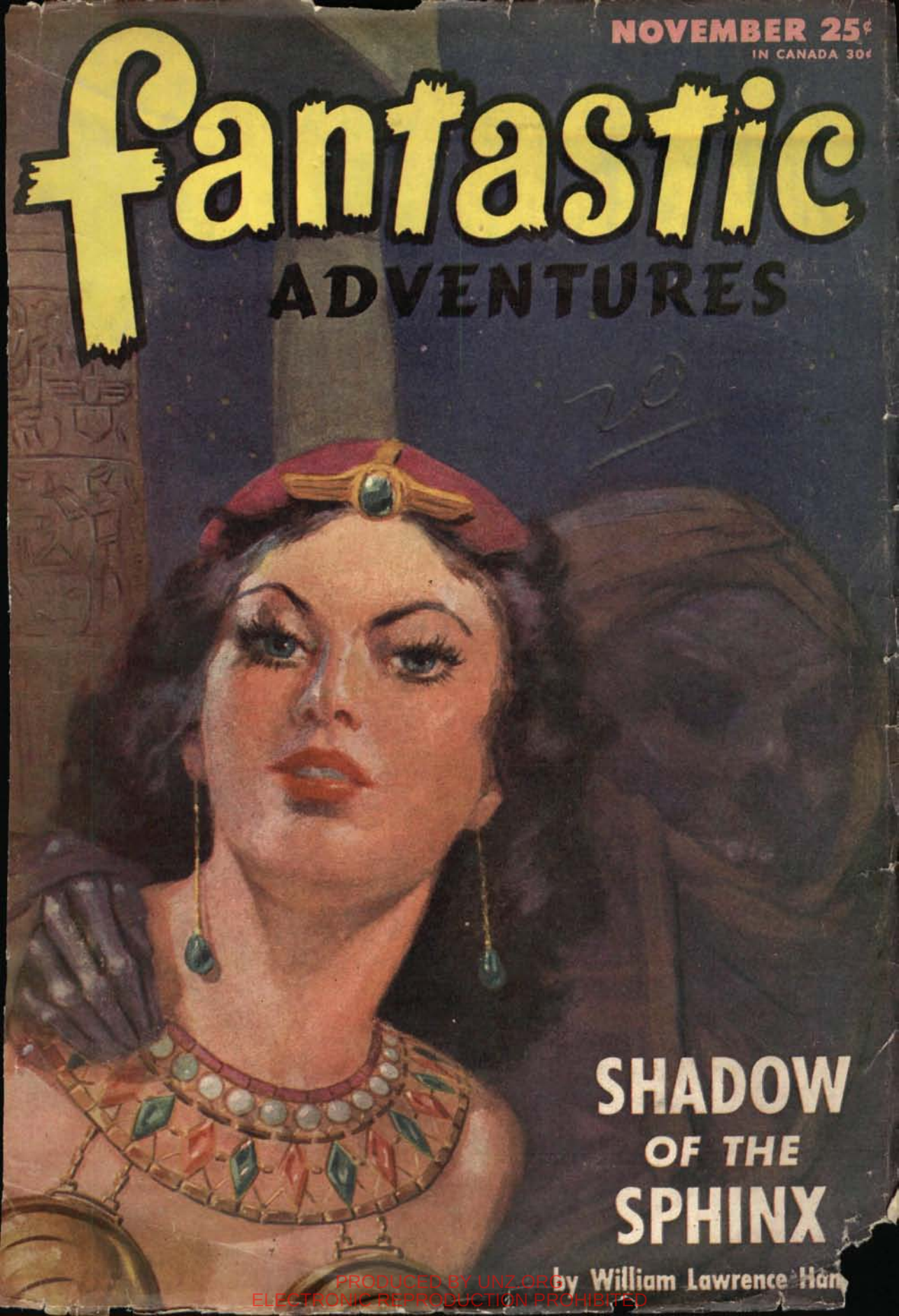

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Meet the Author

MARGARET ST. CLAIR

I WAS caught more or less by surprise when the editors of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES asked me to send in a photograph and autobiography of myself. Luckily I just had a few snapshots taken and so was able to airmail one in—to meet the usual editorial deadline. (It never fails to happen this way—whenever an editor gets in touch with you for something, it always has to meet a deadline.)

As much as the old saying goes about women liking to talk about themselves, I for one, don't. Maybe it's because I'd rather write fiction instead of fact. At any rate, I'll try to give my memory a few whirls and see what comes out.

I first ran across science fiction when I was nine or ten years of age. I remember reading Frank Stockton's "My Terminal Moraine," and being very much impressed. From that it was just a short step to Jules Verne and his "Journey To The Center Of The Earth," and this in turn lead me to the old Hugo Gernsback publication, *Electrical Something* All this was a preamble to the modern age of science fiction most prevalent in the thirties and which has certainly matured in the present decade.

It was an interesting thing to watch science and fantasy fiction grow from the "battle between worlds" theme to the current "human interest" type of story. Really, I'm glad it has taken this trend, because it seems to me that a story about people—their problems, emotions, triumphs, and failures, is a far more interesting story to read—and write. At any rate, I find this to be true.

NONE the less, when I first turned to writing, it was not through the one medium I enjoyed the most, namely, fantasy. I first tried my hand at detective and mystery stories, and even the so called "quality" stories. I had some success with these types and my work has appeared in detective and quality magazines. But there always seemed to be something lacking, as far as I was concerned. I didn't get the same kick out of them that I thought I would. So as a last resort I turned to the field my personal tastes naturally ran to. I think I've found myself in fantasy. It is not only a great deal of fun to write fantasy, but I enjoy the freedom of imagination attained in this sort of writing. I like to write about ordinary people of the future, surrounded by gadgetry of super-science, but who, I feel sure, know no more about how the machinery works than a present day motorist knows of the laws of thermodynamics. I think this adds to realism because it is essentially true.

During the odd moments when I wasn't writing, I received a degree from the University of California, got married, and concentrated on some of my pet hobbies. These include raising carnations and exotic flowering bulbs, and the more difficult and absorbing task of raising Dachshund puppies. This latter hobby has its financial attributes since I've sold more Dachshunds than I care to think about.

As a native Californian you'll probably think the Chamber of Commerce hired me to say that I like it out here in Richmond, but I assure you it's my own idea. Our home is on a hilltop six miles from Richmond, with a view that reaches from here clear around to there. The weather is invariably fine, the country is fine, and if we could build a thirty foot wall to eliminate an occasional wind, we would have a terrestrial paradise.

Unlike most pulp writers, I have no special ambitions to make the pages of the big slick magazines. I feel that the pulps at their best touch a genuine folk tradition and have a balladic quality which the slicks lack. But I must admit to a fond affection for the columns of the *New Yorker*. Right now I hope to keep doing science fantasy fiction which will please both editors and readers.

—*Margaret St. Clair*

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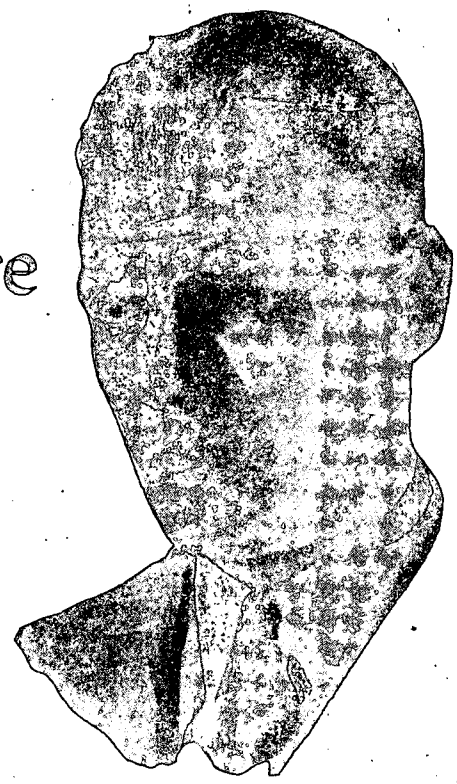
What keeps YOU from making more MONEY?



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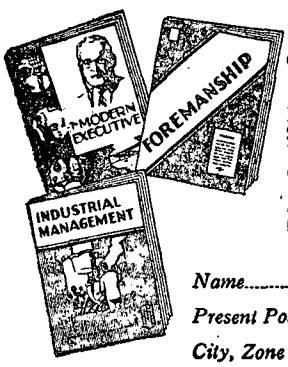

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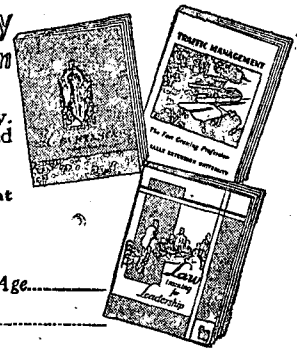

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

NOVEMBER 1946

VOLUME 8 NUMBER 5

All FEATURES Complete

PRESENTING THE AUTHOR ..... by Margaret St. Clair 2

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK ..... by The Editor 6

TRANSPLANTING ANIMAL HEARTS ..... by Pete Bogg 69

SIGHT WITHOUT EYES ..... by R. Clayton 91

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS ..... by Alexander Blade .. 111

BONE STUDY ..... by Charles Reeves ... 139

OIL HUNTERS ..... by C. S. Rice 175

ENCHANTED ARENA ..... by Gary Lee Horton . 176

HEAD SPIN ..... by H. A. Everts 176

FRANKLIN'S FEAT ..... by Cory Blake 177

SOLAR ENERGY ..... by Pete Bogg 177

Front cover painting by J. Allen St. John, illustrating a scene from "Shadow of the Sphinx"

NOVEMBER 1946

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VOLUME 8 NUMBER 5

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE'RE leading off this issue with a short novel by William Lawrence Hamling, entitled: "Shadow of the Sphinx." The story starts off in the Field Museum in Chicago, and ends up on the sands of Egypt. You'll cover a lot of ground in this yarn, and you'll meet a very interesting woman named Zaleikka. The most interesting thing about her is her age. Most people can't guess a woman's age, and in Zaleikka's case, a safe guess would be in the thousands —of years. J. Allen St. John painted the cover around the story, and also did the interiors. We think he caught the mood of the story pretty well. See if you don't agree with us.

NEXT in line we're presenting a newcomer to our pages, one Margaret St. Clair. We were wading through the slush mail one day and came across a story entitled, "Rocket to Limbo" which we started to read. We kept on reading and a check went out as soon as we finished with the story. Miss St. Clair is new to the pages of science-fiction, but if this first story of hers is any indication of the future, we'd say you'll be seeing her name again. You'll find a photograph and autobiography of Miss St. Clair on page two. (We might point out that Miss St. Clair is really a Mrs. It seems that authors invariably drop their husbands or wives, as the case may be, when they use a by-line. Anyway, it probably sounds better that way.) But Miss or Mrs. we think the lady knows how to write. See if you don't agree.

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS can always be depended upon to write an unusual story. In this issue he presents, "The Counterfeiter," a story about a little man with a machine that could duplicate things. It started out with hundred dollar bills and ended up with—but you read the story and find out yourself. Incidentally, Bob dropped in on us a week ago for a short visit from his home town, St. Louis. We were mighty glad to see him—and especially the swell yarns he brought along with him. You'll be seeing these yarns in future issues of FA.

"THE Moving Finger Writes—And Having Writ." The first four words of this couplet are the title of an unusual novelette by Berkeley Livingston. The story concerns the hand of fate writing across the pages of time. It seems that there was one man who could read what was written on those pages, and he made it his business to let the world—and certain individuals know about it. These particular individuals learned to fear the prophecies in a very special sort of way. They usually died . . .

CHESTER S. GEIER is back again this issue with another "Geier" type of story. It is called, "Happiness Is Nowhere." To say that it is a "different" type of story is unnecessary since Chet has become known for his unusual themes. In this novelette he tells about a strange world in a strange time, into which a man with problems of his own in this world is thrown. He meets a girl in this strange world who tries to show this man a simple road to happiness. But as in our own world, happiness is not always easy to find. Still, there is always a way . . .

H. B. HICKEY dug up an old Norse legend and didn't know what to do with it. We had the only logical answer—write a story around it. Hickey did just that, and the result was "The Smiling Wife." The legend behind this story is no more unusual than any countless number of other legends that have stayed with man through the ages. In our modern civilization people are prone to scoff at legends and superstitions—most people, that is. You will find many who fervently believe in them however. And in the final analysis who is to say they are wrong? Strange things happen to men sometimes, things which cannot be explained by exact science. The legend of the Smiling Wife is one of these.

WE FINISH up the issue with a Don Wilcox novelette entitled, "The Red Door." This ought to be enough said, since Don is one of the most popular writers ever to appear in our pages. We've put this story in the back of the book for a definite reason. Most people care to have their dessert after the main meal. We think this story fills the bill. It concerns a little kingdom known as Askandia, and a ruler named Levaggo. This ruler had a penchant for doors, and in all his kingdom there was no door closed to him—except one. This door was a red door, and what lay behind it, nobody had ever come back to tell about. The king was a naturally curious man—besides being a very proud and possessive man. So he set out to open the red door and take a peek . . . . .

Which just about winds things up for this issue. But we'll be back next month with a string of headliners—as usual. See you then.....*Rap*

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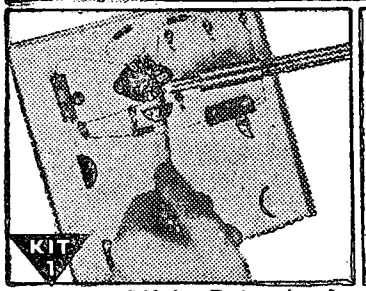

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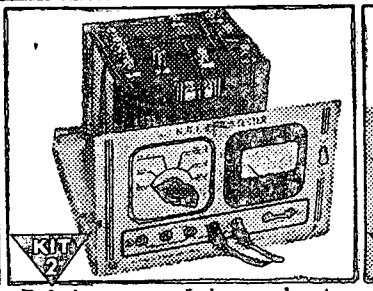
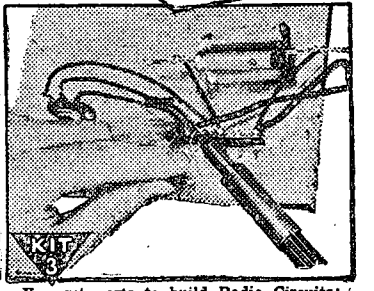


Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.



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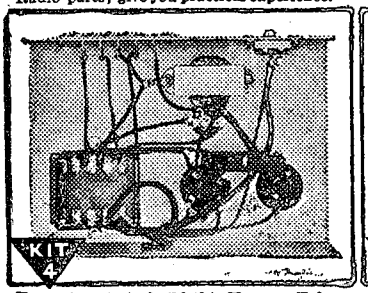

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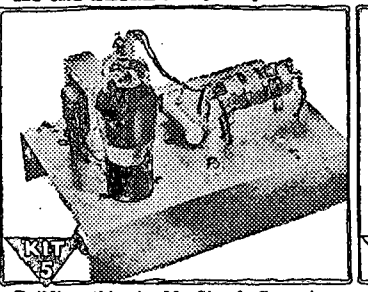

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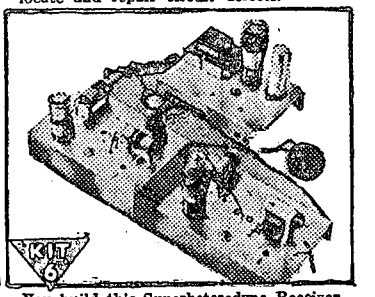

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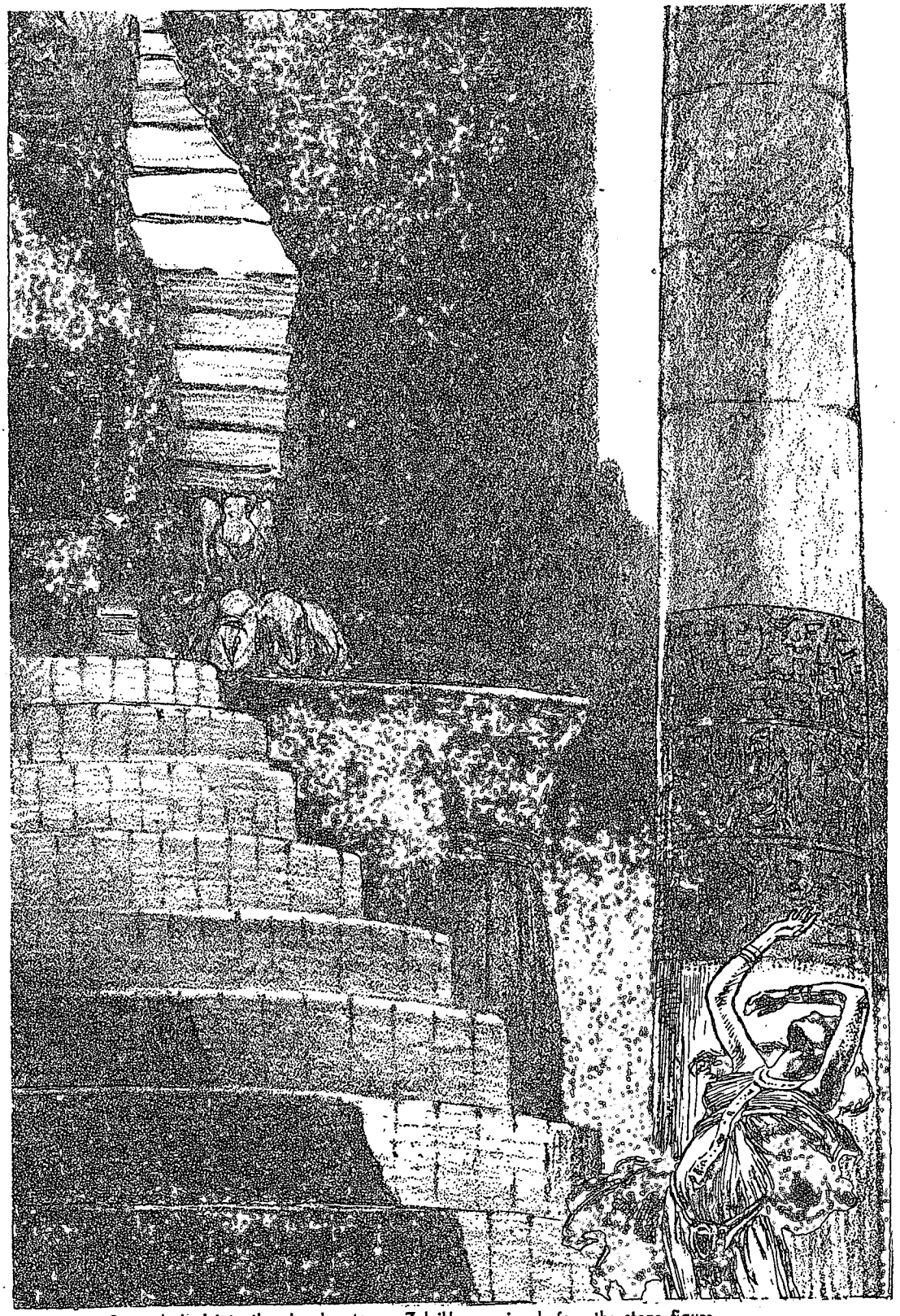

Barry dashed into the chamber to see Zaleikka swaying before the stone figure

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SHADOW of the SPHINX

By WILLIAM LAWRENCE HAMLING

CHAPTER I

A Mummy Vanishes

"BUSY day again, Mr. Randall." Barry Randall nodded to the head guard and paused to scan the influx of the afternoon crowd. "Looks like it, Mike," he said. "Tell the boys to keep their eyes peeled. With Doctor Slater retiring and the Curatorship open, I wouldn't want anything to happen. I've all but got the job cinched."

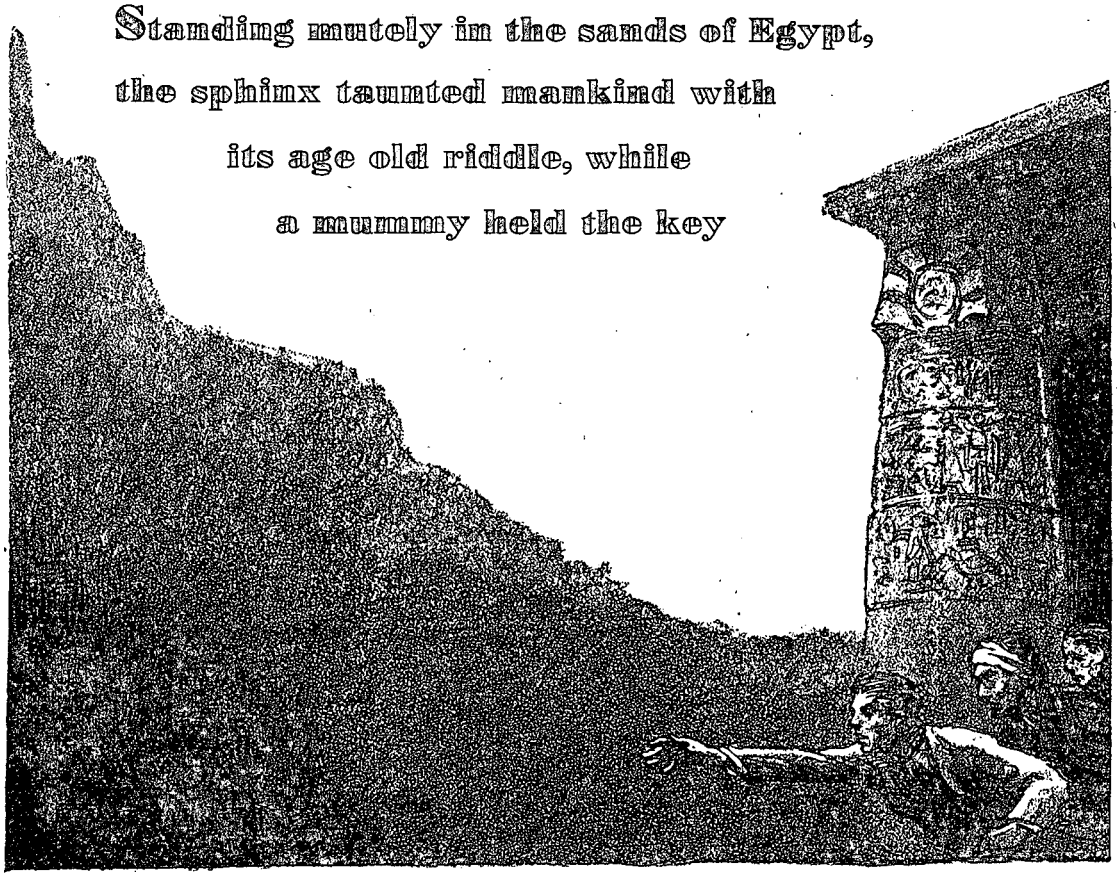
Mike looked surprised. "I've been connected with the Field Museum for over fifteen years, Mr. Randall, and I've yet to see anything happen."

Barry shrugged. "You never know," he said and strode into the side aisle leading to the Curator's office. He had taken only about three steps when he heard Mike calling him back. He turned questioningly.

"What's the matter?"

Mike frowned. "Nothing, really, Mr. Randall. I just happened to remember those three geezers who have been coming in every afternoon—you know, the guys who go to the Egyptian

Standing mutely in the sands of Egypt, the sphinx taunted mankind with its age old riddle, while a mummy held the key



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wing and just stand for a couple of hours before that Priestess Zaleikka's mummy. Well they came in about five minutes ago. Suppose I better put a guard on that aisle just in case?"

Barry paused thoughtfully for a moment, and then shook his head. "No, don't bother. I'll take a look myself. Thanks, Mike."

He strode away, mixing himself with the crowd and unconsciously chewed the inside of his lower lip. So they were there again! It was getting to be an almost regular occurrence. Every afternoon, promptly at three they arrived and made a beeline for the Egyptian wing. Nothing else in the museum seemed to hold any attraction for them. And only one item in the Egyptian wing seemed worthy of their attention. It wasn't normal. Ordinary visitors didn't do that. And more than anything else, why did they pick on the mummy of an obscure Priestess of the Fourth Dynasty? There was nothing about her to excite undue interest that he knew. He had even traced back on her history in the past few days to make sure. All that was known about her was that she had lived in the time of King Khafre, the builder of the Sphinx. Her tomb had been opened in the ancient ruins of Gizeh near the great Pyramid. There was some connection between her and the Priests of the Temple of Karnak, but nothing definite. Why should anybody single her out for intensive study, day after day?

He rounded the facade of the Egyptian wing and strolled slowly down the fifth aisle. Only a few scattered visitors were in the wing.

At the end of the aisle he stopped. There was a large display case jutting out at right angles to the aisle. He slipped behind it and peered cautiously over the glass top.

They stood at the far end of the aisle, huddled silently around the upright mummy case, like an expectant audience. Barry scrutinized the men. Two tall, hulking individuals, with a smaller, slighter one between them. It was almost as though the two were guarding the smaller one, protecting him against some threatened menace. They had short foreheads, flat noses of the prize ring, little, hard eyes almost hidden in gristle and scar tissue. One of them was obviously of foreign stock, his skin a dark swarthy baked tan. Barry thought of the Orient.

The man between them presented an entirely different picture. He was small, dapper, in a blue melton overcoat and gray homburg hat. His features were classic and pale, almost as if someone had chiseled them in a hard stone. He had a small waxed moustache which he fingered delicately with a finely gloved hand. His fingers were long and slender, and the expensive kid that covered them seemed in harmony with the alabaster face it touched. His left hand held a black leather traveling bag.

They just stood there, silently staring. And Barry Randall frowned. Why? Just as every day, they stood there before the mummy, as if transfixed.

THE swarthy faced man suddenly turned his head and Barry caught two black piercing eyes fixed on him. He felt himself growing embarrassed under that gaze—as if he had been a child caught stealing apples in somebody's yard. The man nudged the shorter man next to him. Slowly the pale features turned toward the aisle. Barry felt a pair of cold blue eyes. There was something almost hypnotic in them. And something else. Something *alien*.

Almost before he knew it he was

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walking down the aisle toward them. He stopped a few feet away and managed a smile.

"I'm Barry Randall, Assistant Curator of the museum—is there any way I can help you?"

They stared at him, and it was the smaller man who finally answered in crisp decisive words:

"Thank you, no—Mr. Randall."

Nothing more. But the tone left Barry with the assurance that he was expected to leave. Questions rose to his lips but the coldness of the man's eyes stilled them. He shrugged and turned away.

He had taken only a few steps but the resolve was now firm in his mind that something was wrong. Nothing tangible that he could see, but he felt it. "Maybe Mike was right about putting a guard here," he muttered. And then he stopped short.

"Mr. Randall."

He turned to find the smaller man staring at him. He retraced his steps.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Randall, there is something you can tell me."

Barry inclined his head. "Yes?"

"This mummy, Mr. Randall—is it genuine?"

It was such a silly question that Barry could have laughed. His premonitions swept away as he nodded.

"Of course it is genuine. The priestess Zaleikka's tomb was excavated quite by accident two years ago during the war, at Gizeh, Egypt. Is there anything in particular you care to know about her? Her history is sketchy and obscure but I'd be glad—"

"Thank you, Mr. Randall." The man nodded his head imperceptibly and Barry felt the coldness return.

"May I ask just why you are so interested—"

"Thank you—no."

There was nothing else to do but walk away. He met Mike out in the central annex directing a group of people. Mike nodded to him.

"Did you see those guys, Mr. Randall?"

Barry grinned. "You can forget about them, Mike. They're a little queer, but harmless. The only thing they wanted to know was if the mummy was authentic!"

Mike laughed. "It takes all kinds," he said. "What did they think this was—Madame Toussard's?"

IT WAS five minutes to closing time. Barry glanced at his wrist watch as he sat behind his desk in the Curator's office, thumbing through some late afternoon mail. He liked the feel of the padded leather chair. He also liked the little "Curator" on the glazed glass door facing him. In just another week, after the Board of Directors met, he'd have that title permanently. Why shouldn't he? The Museum affairs were running smoothly, there hadn't been any trouble since he took over in an acting capacity.

The door burst open and Mike rushed into the room.

"Mr. Randall!"

Barry glanced up, startled. "What the hell's got into you?"

Mike gripped the edges of the desk with nervous fingers. His eyes were wide and bulging. Sweat glistened on his forehead.

"The mummy—it's gone! It's disappeared!"

Barry stiffened in his chair. "Mummy? What mummy?"

Mike swallowed hard. "The mummy — Priestess Zaleikka — it's been stolen!"

Barry sat stunned. It took a few moments for the words to sink in, and when they did, his face grew pale. "If

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this is some kind of a joke, Mike . . ."

"So help me God, Mr. Randall, it's gone—vanished! Come and see for yourself!"

Barry shot out of the chair. Seconds later he was running through the deserted Egyptian wing with Mike at his heels. Even as he rounded the fifth aisle he knew what he was going to find.

The mummy case was empty.

He stood there staring in disbelief while behind him Mike was babbling.

"See—it's gone! I just happened to be walking through the wing on a final checkup before closing — I was still thinking of those three geezers and how funny they acted . . ."

Barry whirled. "That's it! Sound the alarm—lock the doors! They must still be inside—the guard at the entrance wouldn't have let them get by!"

Mike nodded and hurried away. Moments later there was a loud clanging of bells and a rising shout of voices as the museum guards alerted. Barry was running down the fifth aisle toward the entrance even as Mike came running with the entrance guard beside him.

"They've gone!" Mike blurted out. "Slim says they left about fifteen minutes ago!"

Barry grabbed the startled guard by the arm. "Think hard, man! Are you *sure* they left? Were they carrying anything?"

The man shook his head. "Yes, sir —no, sir—I mean yes I'm sure they left, but they weren't carrying anything — they only had the girl with them."

Barry froze. "Girl? What girl?"

"I don't know, Mr. Randall," the guard replied. "I never saw her before. I don't even remember seeing her come in this afternoon and I've been on duty since this morning. I would have remembered her face too . . ."

Mike was shaking his head perplexedly. "But if you're sure they didn't have anything with them—and I'll be damned if they could carry a mummy past you without your knowing it—then where in blazes did it go?"

The guard shrugged. "I don't know. All I can tell you is that I saw the three of them leave—and their hands were empty. And they had a girl with them."

SOMETHING clicked in Barry Randall's mind. He remembered when he had seen them last, the shorter man in the homburg hat had been carrying a black traveling bag!

"Look, Slim," he said tensely. "Are you sure one of them wasn't carrying a black bag?"

The guard screwed up his face in thought. "Now that you mention it I remember one of them *did* have a bag when they came in!"

Barry turned abruptly and retraced his steps back to the empty mummy case. Swiftly he searched around the case and his breath drew in sharply.

He pulled the bag, now open and empty, from behind the case.

"That's it!" Slim announced.

Barry nodded grimly. Yes, that was it. But what did it mean? Three men walk into the museum, one of them carrying this leather bag. Three men walk out of the museum, without the bag, *but with a young woman in its place!* And at the same time a mummy over three thousand years old disappears!

"Mr. Randall! Look at this!"

Mike was over in the shadowed corner behind the mummy case. When he walked back into the light, his hands were holding a mass of cloth.

"Good Lord!" Barry muttered. "Those are linen mummy wrappings!"

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Mike was swallowing hard. "Sir, I don't like the looks of this. If them guys stole the mummy, why should they bother to unwrap it—here? And besides, *they* couldn't have stolen it—Slim would have seen it!"

Barry felt himself growing cold inside. He was afraid to think of what had started to grow in his mind. He stared at the mass of yellowed and brittle linen in Mike's hands. There was no doubt but that the mummy had been unwrapped by somebody — and the black bag, what had it contained? Something to take the place of the wrappings? But why? And if it had, what had become of the mummy? The men hadn't carried it out — and it couldn't walk out of its own volition!

Or could it? . . . The chill inside him grew. It was fantastic, too incredible to think of. But he thought of it, he couldn't help it. *Who* was the girl that had walked out with them? And *where* had she come from? . . .

"Mr. Randall—look at this!"

Mike had dropped the tattered cloth strips on the floor and something had fallen out of the mass. Mike had it in his hand. It was a glove.

"One of them must have dropped this," he said.

Barry took the glove, his fingers trembling. Yes, one of them had dropped it! A vision sprang up in his mind of a gloved hand delicately fingering a small waxed moustache. The man who wore the homburg hat, of course!

"What do you make of it, Mr. Randall? Any way we can trace it?" Mike broke in on his thoughts.

Barry studied the glove without answering. It was a gray, sleek kid glove, obviously expensive. From the appearance of the leather it was practically new. He turned back the flap, and there it was. The label.

"Antoine's, Custom Made," he said aloud. Antoine's. The word echoed in his mind. Of course! Antoine's on Michigan Avenue—one of the most exclusive shops in the Loop area.

"Mr. Randall, what are we going to do—call the police?" Mike was fidgeting beside him.

"Police?" Barry echoed the word. Yes, he would like to call the police. But *could* he? What would he tell them? That a mummy had been stolen? *Had* it been stolen? You couldn't put a mummy in your back pocket and walk past an alert guard. The police would laugh at that. But where was the mummy then? Somewhere in the museum?

Footsteps pounded up the aisle. Barry turned swiftly as a group of guards ran up. One of them blurted out:

"We've searched everywhere, sir. It would have been impossible to leave the Egyptian wing with the mummy without somebody noticing it. It's not in the museum!"

Not in the museum. Barry stared down at the glove. Antoine's. Suddenly he stared at his watch. It was a quarter past five. There might be time yet! He turned to Mike determinedly.

"We won't call the police, Mike. We don't have any real evidence that the mummy was stolen. Hush the matter up for the time being — I'll be responsible."

"But the Directors!" Mike protested.

The chill grew inside Barry. Yes, the directors. They would be coming soon, and they wouldn't like this. Anger gripped him.

"I'll have it back before the Directors come!" he snapped.

Mike watched him stride away and sadly shook his head.

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CHAPTER II

Dr. Anubis

"I'M SORRY, sir, we're closing for the day."

Barry Randall had one foot in the door and the clerk was staring at him politely, but coldly.

"I know it's late," Barry protested, "but it's very important that I see you tonight—"

The clerk was adamant as he tried to dislodge Barry's foot from the door. "I'm sorry, sir, but our sales have closed for the day."

"I don't want to buy anything!" Barry shouted. "I want to see the manager!"

The clerk stepped back almost fearfully and Barry wedged himself inside the door. He was just in time to see a tall, bristling man, dressed in flowing tails and pin-stripe trousers, come blustering up.

"What is the matter, Perkins?" he demanded haughtily.

"This man, sir, he insists on coming in," the clerk answered.

"Indeed!" Pencil pants fixed frosty eyes on Barry. Barry snorted disgustedly.

"I want to see the manager. My name is Randall, here is my card." He handed pencil pants a card. The frosty eyes swept over the engraving and a miraculous change ensued. Finely kept eyebrows puckered up and an effusive smile transferred the ice into a welcome of warmth.

"Mr. Randall of the Museum! Come right in, sir — it is a bit late, true, but—" He took Barry's arm courteously and favored the astonished clerk with an icy glare. "You may lock the door, now, Perkins—and kindly watch your manners hereafter!"

Barry was swept up to an elaborate display counter that fairly screamed dollars with a capital D.

"*I* am the manager, Mr. Randall, and now, how can I serve you?"

The manager rubbed his well-kept fingers together expectantly. Barry conceived that if he didn't reach for his check book he would be committing a sacrilege. He pulled the kid glove from his coat pocket.

"This is one of your products, isn't it?"

The manager took the glove and turned it with deft fingers. A wide smile covered his face. "But of course —the Cordovan kid! You wish another pair?"

Barry sighed. "No, I do not wish another pair. I rather expected that since this is an expensive glove, and obviously custom made, that you would have a record of the sale. To be exact, to whom you actually sold it."

The manager frowned. "But I don't understand—is this not your glove?"

Barry shook his head patiently. "No. It is not my glove. One of our visitors at the museum left it behind this afternoon, and for very good reasons I want to return it personally."

"Oh." Sadness erased the dollar-and-cents smile. "You wish me to trace the owner from our files—is that it?"

"Yes, if you don't mind," Barry replied wearily. "It is very urgent."

Pencil pants shrugged dolefully. "Very well, Mr. Randall. If you will just wait a few minutes."

"I'll wait."

The few minutes were close to half an hour. But finally the manager made his appearance. He had a beaming smile, the glove, and a slip of paper.

"I have it, Mr. Randall. This glove was made for a Doctor Anubis of one hundred East Wilton Place. I have the address written down."

"Dr. Anubis!" the words crossed

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Barry Randall's lips. An odd chill seemed to grip him. He remembered an alabaster face. A strange, classic face, a face that now seemed to take on new significance. The mummy . . . Egypt . . . "Anubis!"

"Yes, it is an odd name, isn't it?" Pencil pants was still beaming. "Possibly you might be interested in a pair of gloves like this—they are the best, I can assure you — the last word in *chic!*"

Barry didn't seem to hear him. He mumbled a vague "Thank you," and headed for the door. Perkins had it open before he got there.

Pencil pants watched him stalk out, his mouth open. "A definitely peculiar fellow," he observed, clicking his teeth into place. "But he must have money! . . . Oh, well."

Outside, Barry Randall hailed a passing cab.

WILTON Place was a private one-way street running for three blocks West of Sheridan Road. The Drake Hotel loomed up into the night a few blocks south. Barry Randall discharged the cab and stood for a few moments on the silent street staring at the bronzed "100" set in a formidable masonry wall. An old fashioned iron gate was open on a cobblestone driveway, from which he could see the vague outline of a string of parked cars.

The inside of the wall was ringed with a tall hedge, and the grounds, going back for some fifty feet were spattered with tall cottonwoods. The house itself, as he approached it from the driveway, was an old brownstone mansion, a relic of the days of the Armours, Wilsons and Fields. It was a huge sprawling affair, and the first thing Barry noted was the absence of lights in the countless windows. He looked at the parked cars and frowned. "Visitors, and no lights!"

Three stone steps led up to the door. Off to the right and left ran another hedge, smaller than the one girding the wall.

His footsteps sounded eerily on the stone steps leading to the door. The door itself was a massive structure of oak. An ancient tarnished knocker was set square in the middle. Barry lifted the handle and knocked.

It was a strangely muffled sound. Unconsciously he stepped back once his hand had left the knocker.

A long moment passed, and then, silently, the door opened.

Barry caught a glimpse of a long shadowed hall with a single light fixture casting weak rays down it toward a double paneled sliding door. Probably the entrance to the living or dining room. Then before he could see more, a huge figure shoved into the opening.

Barry started involuntarily. The man was clad in a scarlet robe that hid his entire body! But not only the strange clothing he wore caught Barry's attention. He saw a swarthy scarred set of features—a face he suddenly knew. *This was one of the men he had seen in the Egyptian wing at the museum!*

"Yes? What do you want?" a gruff voice demanded.

Barry took a deep breath and stepped forward. He realized that this man must have recognized him also, but he was making no indication that he had. "Is this the residence of Doctor Anubis?"

The man in red nodded, and Barry caught a glimpse of dark baleful eyes.

"I'd like to see the Doctor. Tell him I have something to return to him."

The man stared at Barry for a long moment, and Barry had the uncom-

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fortable feeling that he was trying to decide whether to kick him down the steps or just slam the door in his face.

"The Doctor is very busy. You'll have to make an appointment some other time. Good night."

"Wait!" Barry cried out. "I demand that you tell the Doctor I am here—"

The door slammed in his face. For a moment hot anger swept through Barry. He debated pounding loudly on the door, but the vision was fresh in his mind of that hulking brute in the red robe. The thought bothered him. Why, if the man were a butler, or even granting that he were not, should he be wearing a scarlet robe? For what purpose? And why had he refused to at least query the master of the house before slamming the door so abruptly?

BARRY turned angrily away from the door. There was only one thing left to do. And bitterly he realized that he had made a fool of himself by not doing it from the beginning. He would have to go to the police and have official action taken. Inspector Merton, an old friend of his father's, seemed the most likely. He wouldn't refuse to investigate even though the evidence was so pitifully small.

And as he walked slowly down the cobblestone drive toward the gate, the question again arose in his mind as to the girl Slim had seen. Had there actually been such a girl? And what *had* happened to the mummy?

"Oh!"

Barry jumped. A soft body had collided with him in the dark. His arm shot out protectively, and it collided with soft, yielding flesh. A short cry of pain followed.

"Say, what is this!"

It was a girl, there was no doubt of it. Her voice sounded angrily. Barry stepped back embarrassed.

"I beg your pardon, Miss—I didn't see you in the dark!"

"Do you lash out at every person you meet—in the dark?" she demanded painfully.

"I'm sorry," Barry stammered, "I was expecting something else . . ."

"Some *thing?*" the girl stormed, "Do I look like a thing?—"

"You don't understand—I said I was sorry." A sudden thought struck him. "Are you going to see Dr. Anubis?"

"Well, I must say you do manage to change the subject and wriggle out of things! What if I am—is there any law against it—and is that any reason why you should take a swing at me in his private grounds—and by the way, just *who* are you?"

Barry grinned in the dark. There was something pleasing about her voice, even the fire in it that licked out at him. He took her arm gently and led her off the driveway toward a shaft of light from an overhanging street light on the other side of the masonry wall.

"I was just going to ask you that same question," he replied.

"Let go of my arm, I don't trust you."

"Very well."

The rays of the street lamp fell suddenly around them and Barry whistled softly. "Well!"

"Well what?" she said icily.

Barry was looking at a pert upturned nose, flashing blue eyes, a wealth of copper-gold hair, and if the light evening wrap she was wearing wasn't lying, a smooth rounded figure.

"I trust I meet your satisfaction!" she snapped.

Barry grinned. "You do. I must bump into you more often after this."

She sniffed. "You don't look like a moron—but you talk like one!"

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"I'm sorry I disappoint you," Barry answered.

THE girl studied him intently for a moment. She noted the lean tenseness of his features, handsome in a sudden cast of grimness. She saw strength and stubbornness there, and something else. . . .

"What newspaper are *you* working for?" she asked suddenly.

"Newspaper? What makes you think I'm a newspaperman?"

"Don't try to give me the run-around," she countered. "If you were a member of the cult you'd—act different. If you think you're going to scoop me on this story—"

"Did you say cult?" Barry's voice grew tense.

The girl noticed the change and stared up at him. "I suppose you're going to say you don't know anything about it! If you don't, just who are you and why are you prowling around outside this house?"

Barry gripped the girl's arm suddenly.

"You're a reporter—right?"

She nodded. "As if you didn't know. I'm with the *Blade*. And you're hurting my arm."

Barry relaxed his grip. "My name is Barry Randall, I'm connected with the Field Museum, Assistant Curator . . ."

"The Field Museum? Curator?" The girl's voice was incredulous. "You don't look like a Curator!"

"What did you expect, a flowing beard and horn-rimmed glasses?" Barry felt a sudden anger. "Look, Miss—"

"Joan Forrest," she replied. "And I'm sorry if I said anything I shouldn't —I thought you were working on this story too."

Barry caught the sudden warmth in her eyes and she smiled. She had small, white, even teeth. He liked them.

"Thanks, Miss Forrest. I guess I'm the one who should apologize though—my nerves are on edge . . ." He paused. "Look, Miss Forrest, I'm in a rather peculiar position — this afternoon a mummy was stolen from the museum. While I have no definite evidence, I have reason to believe that Doctor Anubis is connected with the theft, if not actually responsible."

"Doctor Anubis?" the girl echoed. "Why, he's the man who owns this house . . ."

"Exactly."

"But I don't understand—you say a *mummy* was stolen? How did anybody manage to take a mummy out of the museum unseen?"

Barry sighed. "That's just the point, nobody *was seen* taking the mummy out—and it would have been impossible to leave the museum without being observed by one or more guards. Now you can understand, perhaps, the position I'm in. While I suspect the Doctor, and with good reason, I still can't go to the police with my story. I can't really prove that the mummy *was* stolen!"

"Have you spoken to this Doctor Anubis yet?"

Barry grunted. "I couldn't get past his watchdog at the front door—which reminds me, you haven't explained your part in being here. I believe you mentioned something about a cult?"

The girl nodded. "Yes. But I'm afraid I can't tell you very much. You see, being a newspaper woman I get around quite a little, and I heard a rumor of a new secret society, having something to do with ancient Egypt—something of a specialized Rosicrucian Order. Well, to make a long story short, I decided it might be worth looking into. Since the war, news has been pretty scarce, and well, I was going to try and crash the gates tonight . . ."

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"Fat chance you would have," Barry replied. "If I know—"

He broke off suddenly and grabbed the girl's arm. "Quick! Down behind this hedge—there's a car turning in!"

A SET of headlights split the darkness at the head of the drive and a car hummed through the gateway. Behind the hedge, Barry and the girl crouched. Barry was unaware that he was still gripping her arm until she winced beside him.

"Sorry," he breathed, relaxing his fingers.

She didn't reply, but Barry could hear her breathing close beside him, and then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world to do, her fingers suddenly found his in the dark.

The car had entered the cobblestone driveway, and its lights threw back the shadows around the house. Under the artificial glare, the house seemed to take on a new added menace, like a slumbering monster discovered in its lair by a sudden flash of light. The car slowed and finally stopped behind another parked vehicle. Barry heard the car door slam.

"Come on!" he whispered.

"What? Where?—"

"I want to get closer to the house—see what happens!" he replied.

He tightened his grip on her fingers and drew her silently from behind the hedge. Swiftly they moved across the open grounds, dodging behind the cottonwood trees. By the time they had hidden themselves behind the hedge skirting the house, the occupants of the car had reached the door. Barry heard the hollow sound of the knocker.

Moments passed like interminable years. Barry and the girl huddled themselves closely against the wall behind the bushes and then, the door opened. They heard:

"Yes, what is it?"

"Zaleikka."

"Enter."

The door closed.

Silence once again. Behind the bushes, Joan Forrest breathed excitedly. "Did you hear that—Barry?"

"Yes, I heard," he answered in a muffled voice.

"What does it mean—Zaleikka?"

Yes, what *did* it mean! Obviously it was a password—known only to the members who entered this weird house of Doctor Anubis—but it was also the name of the vanished Egyptian Priestess! Barry's mind whirled.

"Barry, what's the matter?"

"That name," he muttered, "you remember I told you about the mummy that was stolen from the museum—well, that mummy was an ancient Priestess of the Temple of Karnak, named Zaleikka!"

"Oh!" her voice sounded small and terrified there in the darkness. "Barry—maybe we'd better go to the police after all . . ."

"Listen, Joan, would you take a chance with me—a big chance?"

She fidgeted in the dark. "I, I don't know—I only came to get a story . . ."

"You'll get a story, if we play our cards right!" he argued. "It will be one of the biggest stories you've ever handled if my hunch is correct—what do you say?"

She was silent for a moment. Then: "I *did* come after a story. What do you want to do?"

"Get in that house," he said.

"But how? You said before that you failed . . ."

"I didn't know what was going on inside—not that I do now for that matter—but most of all, I didn't know the right way to get inside. I do now—Zaleikka is the way!"

"But won't you be recognized at the

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door?"

He smiled grimly. "That's where you come in. *I'm* not going to knock at the door—you are!"

"Oh . . . I begin to see," she said a little nervously. "I'm to give the password . . ."

"Exactly. I'll be right behind you. I'll have my collar turned up and my hat pulled low. If luck is with us, we'll get in."

"And after that?" A trace of fear tinged her words.

"We'll worry about that when the time comes," he replied. "Let's go."

CHAPTER III

Princess Zaleikka

THE knocker sounded dull and hollow. Barry Randall stood tensely waiting a few feet behind the girl, his hat pulled low over his forehead, his topcoat collar turned up. Not even the sounds of night traffic from Michigan Avenue could be heard. Nothing but their tense breathing.

Without prelude the door pulled open. Barry, standing behind the girl saw the same huge figure clad in the scarlet robe. The same swarthy, scarred features.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Zaleikka," the girl replied, without hesitation.

Barry felt his heart pounding. For a long moment the man stared through the door. Then he stepped aside. "Enter."

Joan brushed past him into the hallway. Barry hunched his shoulders and followed. He didn't dare look up, but felt the keen watchful eyes scanning him as he crossed the threshold.

A rough hand suddenly grabbed his shoulder. "You!"

Barry knew what that meant. He had been recognized. Suddenly all the pent up emotion, the anger that had been gnawing at him like a raw sore, swelled and burst.

He twisted savagely and at the same instant smashed his right hand into the guard's stomach. The man gave a startled whoosh as the breath was driven from his body. Barry followed up his advantage with a lashing left hook to the man's jaw. Just as savagely he drove two more hard blows to the guard's face before he had time to recover. The man groaned and slumped forward. Barry caught his body and staggered under its weight. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the girl standing terrified, one hand pressed tightly against her lips.

"Hold the door open—quick!" he whispered.

She ran forward and pulled the door wide. Barry, his breath laboring, dragged the limp form of the guard out on the stone steps. Then he paused, listening.

The silence was complete. So far so good. He dragged the limp figure down the steps and off to the left of the door behind the sheltering hedge. He worked quickly, desperately. The scarlet robe, as he thought, was only a covering for street clothes. He ripped the guard's belt from his pants and trussed his legs with it. Then, pulling the sleeves of the robe free from the man's arms, he trussed the upper portion of his body in straight-jacket fashion. He finished the job with a handkerchief gag.

"That ought to hold him for awhile!" he grunted, straightening.

"I'm scared!" Joan whispered from the door entrance.

Barry joined her. He pushed her gently back inside the house and shut the door. They stood silently for a moment, listening.

Then gradually they heard it. A dull,

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subdued hum of voices. Barry glanced down the long hall toward the double paneled sliding door. The voices were coming from there.

"What shall we do?" the girl whispered fearfully.

Barry pointed down the hall. "We're going to see what's behind that door."

They went silently along the hall, and Barry suffered a thousand agonies of thought. What would they find behind the door? A harmless evening party in progress?—Doctor Anubis?—The stolen mummy?

Barry paused with his hand on the panel door. Then slowly he parted them.

WHAT met his gaze caused him to stare in amazement. He was looking into a huge circular room. Comfortable lounge chairs were set in theater fashion leading up to a raised platform at the far end. Most of the chairs were occupied. People sat conversing in low tones. He couldn't make out their features distinctly in the murky light of a single cut glass chandelier set with small amber colored bulbs. A strange scent of sandalwood incense permeated the room, a sickeningly sweet odor with a hint of pungent age, of an era long forgotten.

But it wasn't the strange conformation of the room that held Barry's eyes. Nor was it the subtle aroma or the shadows created by the ambe rlights. It was a huge scarlet curtain that hung in draping folds from the ceiling. A curtain that rose behind the dais at the far end of the chamber—a curtain with a life-size portrait in oils of an Egyptian woman, a woman whose beauty was so exquisite and breath-taking that she seemed to have life! And on either side of the painting was a huge scrolled *Z*.

Barry felt the girl tremble beside him. He could hear her startled intake of breath. He gripped her fingers tightly and drew her inside the room. With his free hand he slid the panel door shut.

Nobody seemed to notice them. There seemed to be at least two dozen people in the room. Barry decided, as his glance swept around the chairs. Most of them were occupied toward the front. Two rows at the rear were vacant. Barry removed his hat and coat, and holding them in one hand, led the girl to the farthest set of vacant chairs. Very quietly they settled themselves. Almost unconsciously, Barry slumped low in the chair, until only his head was in view over the top of the next row ahead.

For long tense moments they sat there, and Barry wondered just what they were waiting for. His eyes slipped from one person to another in the room. He could see them better now. Middle aged men and women of obvious means judging from their clothes, with a strange intensity about their features. From their subdued murmuring it was evident that they too were waiting.

Waiting for what?

The tremoring clash of a gong split the air. Almost at once the murmuring of the guests ceased, and only the echoing vibration of that single gong stroke remained.

Beside him, the girl trembled. His hand tightened around her fingers. He wanted to speak but he couldn't. He wanted to look at her—reassuringly, but he couldn't tear his eyes from the scarlet curtain and the dais. Somehow he knew that her gaze too was riveted there—waiting.

It began slowly, almost as to be imperceptible. The shadows suddenly began to disperse from the dais and a roseate glow sprang up from some concealed source.

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And then suddenly the curtain swept aside and a man appeared.

BARRY struggled to hold back the startled sound that rose in his throat. He stared at a figure clad from head to foot in a flowing scarlet robe—the same kind of robe the guard at the door had been wearing! But there was something else about this man—cold classic pale features, a small waxed moustache, and piercing eyes—black and magnetic even at a distance.

And Barry knew him—the man in the Homburg hat. Dr. Anubis!

He was like some character on a stage, playing a sinister role. He stood there on the dais, the curtain growing still again behind him, and his eyes focused intently on his audience. His hands were still at his side.

From somewhere behind him, it seemed almost to come from all directions as the sound grew, came the soft notes of a lute. It was a weird melody, without rhyme, a parody on the musical scale. And with the sound, the man on the dais raised his arms slowly until they were over his head. He began a weird chant then, his voice rising and falling in cadence to the lute.

Barry listened, stunned. He knew that language—*it was that of the ancient Copt!*

The chant rose and fell, and the sound of the lute accompanied it. Then with almost the same suddenness, it faded.

The silence that followed was intense. Barry couldn't tear his eyes from that magnetic figure on the dais. The cold, classic features of the man were immobile. It was almost as if the strange chant had cast a spell over the room.

"My friends," his voice broke the growing tenseness. "I am very happy this evening, even as you will be shortly. For the goal that we have been striving for has at long last been achieved.

"If it had not been for all of you—your enduring patience and generous financing of our researches, our goal would still lie unaccomplished. But rest assured that now that success has been accorded us, the rewards will be great indeed."

He paused briefly, and the effect of his words registered on Barry. About him, an excited murmuring of voices rose, only to still when the scarlet robed figure spoke again.

"Ours has been a select task, and the final road to knowledge has not been an easy one. The Ancient Ones had so ordained it, so that their knowledge and powers would not be misused. There have been many who have delved into the past of Egypt—children all of them—and like children, they were led astray. The ancient rulers planned wisely for the future, and Khafre was the wisest of them all."

HE PAUSED again and Barry Randall's mind whirled. What was he talking about? The name of Khafre echoed in his mind. It was King Khafre who had built the Sphinx in the fourth dynasty! But what was all this hinting of planning, of power? . . .

"A key was left," the voice picked up again. "A key so hidden that only a true believer in the might and majesty of ancient Egypt would be able to discover it. The scientists of today have looked vainly for the key among the shattered debris of lost empires, among the dead themselves. And because they did not believe, they failed. For the key has been with us through the ages—with the dead—but the key is life itself!

"We are but a small group gathered in this room tonight, but because we have believed in our search for the an-

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cient secrets, a new world opens before us, *a world of our own shaping!*

"Earlier today I visited the Field Museum. I stood before the mummy of one of the ancients, and knew that my search was ended. The Priestess Zaleikka was that key—waiting to be released from her long slumber . . . You will see her yourself, tonight—now!"

"Barry!" Beside him, the girl whispered urgently. "What is he talking about—what does it all mean?"

Barry shook his head. He couldn't answer. Not yet. Of one thing only he was sure. From Doctor Anubis' own words he had solved the mystery of the missing mummy—it was here! And the scarlet clad man on the dais was brazenly admitting it—about to show it With this proof of theft he could go to the police . . .

His thoughts broke off abruptly. At the front of the room, on the dais, Doctor Anubis had turned his back and gripped the flowing curtain. With a single motion he whipped his arms wide, and the curtain swept open.

Barry Randall expected to see an elaborate sarcophagus with the stolen mummy placed on view.

What he saw was a fantastic throne against a background of incense burners on tripods. Gold trappings hung from the ceiling, wavering amid the sluggish fumes of the burners.

And on the throne, her arms and legs white alabaster against the background of gold, sat a strange exotically beautiful woman.

SHE wore a single garment of gossamer sheen, suspended from a marble smooth throat by a slender gold cord and split from the waist down. Her features were finely cut, small and oval shaped. They might have been hewn from some fragile stone of unbleached purity. Her hair was long and black, gleaming softly in the roseate light. And her eyes . . .

Barry felt a chill run through him. Those eyes were not the eyes of a maid, they didn't belong with so exquisite and chaste a body. They were the eyes of countless ages, flashing green depths of smoldering flame, of knowledge, of things unseen, undreamed,—of purpose . . .

"The Priestess Zaleikka!"

The scarlet robed man bowed low before her. Then his voice spoke in crisp staccato Coptic: "You must greet them, Zaleikka. They have served us well with the money and influence of this age."

Barry could hardly believe his ears. His own knowledge of the ancient tongue had been gained through years of intensive research and study. And yet this strange man spoke it with an assurance and ease that Barry knew he himself could never attain. What did it mean? Was this some gigantic hoax—a confidence game of untold magnitude? Zaleikka? Zaleikka was a mummy—over three thousands years old . . .

With a barely imperceptible movement, she nodded her head. Then her eyes played out over the room. They were wide, bottomless depths, magnetic.

"I greet you from across the ages," the words were uttered without seeming movement of her lips. Her voice was soft, like the tinkle of warm waters against coral reefs. And Barry straightened in his chair. She spoke the ancient Copt with a fluency undreamed of by the most skilled linguist!

Almost at once she seemed to single him out. He felt her gaze fasten upon him, and it was like an unfelt flame. He couldn't tear his eyes away from her. He felt himself unmasked, and knew suddenly that *she* knew him for

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an intruder! And then her gaze suddenly left his.

Beside him, Joan Forrest stiffened. Barry glanced quickly at her. She was staring fixedly at the dais, and her features were pale. Barry knew at once that the woman called Zaleikka had fixed her gaze upon the girl. He gripped her arm and whispered.

"Joan! Come on, let's get out of here before—"

There was a loud noise from behind them. The sliding panel doors crashed open and a loud shout split the hushed silence of the room.

Barry twisted in alarm. It was the guard he had knocked out a short time before! The man rushed into the room, his clothes disheveled, his eyes wild with rage. Behind him came two other men clad in the strange robes. They held revolvers in anxious hands.

"Effendim!" the first man called out toward the dais in swift Arabic. "The Randall man has gained entrance!"

Barry swore and pulled the girl from the seat.

"We'll have to make a break for it!"

Even as the words left his lips and he piloted the girl in a dash for the door, they saw him.

A harsh sound left the guard's throat. He rushed down upon Barry. With a desperate move, Barry shoved the girl aside and met the man's attack. He ducked a savage blow and smashed his fist into the guard's stomach. The force of the blow and the man's weight, knocked him backward.

From somewhere in the room came a loud command. It was the voice of Doctor Anubis. "Take him, you fools!"

Something crashed into the back of Barry's skull. Flame seared through him in an agonizing wave. He sank groaning, his eyes turned on the dais. In his last fleeting moment of consciousness he saw bedlam break loose in the room as the visitors rose fearfully. And then the scarlet curtain swished over the throne, blotting out green, flame filled eyes that sank into oblivion with him . . .

CHAPTER IV

Shadow Of The Sphinx

BARRY RANDALL opened his eyes with the feeling that somebody had opened the back of his head. A throb of pain brought a brief spasm of nausea before his sight cleared. He was aware of a groan slipping from his lips, and of something else—a soft sobbing sound.

He was sitting in a hard wood backed chair. He was facing a massive teakwood desk—and Dr. Anubis.

He was still clad in the scarlet toga, but the classic pale features were no longer immobile, they were etched with a puzzled frown, and something else . . .

Barry heard the sobbing again. He glanced beside him. Joan Forrest sat in a chair opposite him, and behind her, his arms folded, and eyes glaring, stood the guard Barry had trussed in the hedge.

The pain throbbed deeply again and Barry turned his eyes away. He studied the room as he sought to collect his thoughts. It was obviously a library. In the corners, bridging floor to ceiling bookcases, stood two standard lamps, oddly converted candelabra. On the opposite wall hung an obviously priceless Corregio painting. The floor was covered with an exquisite Arab carpet, and in alcoves of the book shelves stood varied busts and statuettes that Barry knew instinctively had graced the chambers of Egyptian rulers long since turned to dust.

"I see you are admiring my small collection, Mr. Randall."

The words came as a sedative to the

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throbbing pain in Barry's head. He centered his gaze upon the man behind the teakwood desk. The features were once again immobile, with the slightest hint of a smile.

"Yes, Mr. Randall, there are many items in this room fit for your worthy museum. Those converted candelabra for instance," he pointed. "They came originally from the workshop of Benvenuto Cellini. And I noticed you looking at my Corregio. It is valued at a quarter million dollars. My shelves too have their value. There is a Shakespeare First Folio, not to mention a Book of the Hours once owned and admired by Marguerite de Valois. I have also a bound authentic chapter from the Book of Thoth reposing there . . . You see Mr. Randall, my tastes run far afield."

Barry sucked in his breath. The utter calm of this man defeated him. There was no denying the art treasures that he so adequately described. And they, more than anything else, served to cloud his struggling senses.

"Just who and what are you—Doctor Anubis?" Barry found his voice cracked and strained.

"Ah. You know my name. But then, you are a singularly aggressive man, Mr. Randall. I must confess I under-estimate your capabilities." He turned his gaze to the guard standing behind Barry and the girl. "Hassan, we will have coffee," he spoke in rapid Arabic.

Barry shook his head. "Don't bother for me, Anubis, all I want is information."

"I see you have a knowledge of the Eastern tongue, Mr. Randall," Anubis returned his gaze to Barry as the guard hesitated. Without preamble he slid open a drawer of his desk and laid a revolver before him. "You may go now, Hassan, I will see that our guests remain."

BARRY was aware of a door closing behind him. Anger gnawed deep inside him as he looked at the gun. Anubis was taking no chances. He glanced quickly at the girl. She was sitting tense and rigid, her knuckles white against the chair arms. Her eyes were turned upon him, worriedly.

"I already have Miss Forrest's story—she is a newspaperwoman," Anubis said. "But you, Randall are another matter. You did not come here merely to return my glove?

Barry saw the glove laying on one corner of the desk. "You know what I came here for!" he replied heatedly. "This afternoon the mummy of an obscure Priestess was stolen from the museum. All the evidence pointed to you. What I have seen and heard in this house tonight proves that I was right—the word Zaleikka is nothing new here—I advise you to turn the mummy over to me before—"

"Mr. Randall," Anubis interrupted him. "You may take my word for it that there is no mummy here. If you took this house apart brick by brick you would find nothing. I advise you to stop looking into things that do not concern you — while you still have time."

Barry laughed harshly. "You're threatening me! Very well, if that's the way you want it I'm very sure the police will be willing to follow up my charges!"

Besides Barry, the girl suddenly leaned forward. "I agree with Barry, and while I don't know exactly what is going on here, I've got enough of a story to expose you—it's apparent that you're operating some kind of racket trying to pass off that woman, whoever she is, for an Egyptian mummy!"

Dr. Anubis sat very still. His eyes

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flashed from the girl back to Barry. His hand rested over the gun. Then he sighed.

"I regret your attitudes. It leaves me no recourse. I had sought to settle this matter amicably but I can see that I have failed. That woman, whom you accuse me of fostering as an imposter, *is* the Priestess Zaleikka."

Barry snorted. "Do you expect anyone to believe such a fantastic assertion? You forget that I have some more than ordinary knowledge of egyptology myself. Do you think you can fool anyone with an elaborate hoax —as you seem to be attempting to do with those people I saw tonight? It is a scientific impossibility to preserve life indefinitely!"

Dr. Anubis allowed a faint smile to pass over his features. "The words of the inevitable skeptic, Mr. Randall. I would have expected nothing else. But consider these facts: You say that a mummy was stolen from your museum. And yet, correct me if I am wrong, you cannot prove this. It would have been impossible for a curio the size of a mummy to be removed from the museum under the watchful eyes of your guards—and yet, the mummy is gone. Where then is it? Secondly, you yourself have seen the Priestess Zaleikka tonight — do you remember that she spoke?"

Barry sat back, visibly shaken. Yes, he had seen her, and he did remember that she had spoken.

Anubis followed his thoughts. "You begin to doubt, am I right, Mr. Randall? Did you by chance recognize the tongue she spoke?"

"Coptic," the word came hoarsely from Barry.

"Exactly. And how many people living today would have a knowledge of this, the most ancient of known tongues? Much less an obviously youthful woman. Ah, I see you are moved."

BARRY shook his head. "But—but such a thought is—impossible!"

The classic features became immobile again. And the eyes, black and forceful, grew cold.

"Mr. Randall, I have in my possession a valuable papyrus. This papyrus came into my possession after many years of research. You asked me before who I was, and what. It must be apparent to you, as indeed it is true, that I am not of Anglo-Saxon heritage. My ancestors can be traced back directly to the ancients who once ruled over Egypt and most of the world. I am of that stock, fast disappearing from the face of the Earth, known as Copts. In my search for the truths I ran across an unknown crypt in the Temple of Wisdom, which you know as Karnak. Certain facts handed down to me through generations, led me to it.

"This papyrus contained a certain history that dates back to the fourth dynasty. It told of a trusted Priestess, high in the regard of Khafre and Ammon Tankh, the High Priest, who had been subjected to the living slumber for a purpose which I am not at liberty to divulge. This Priestess, known as Zaleikka, has slept through the ages—until now. The formula necessary to awaken her was inscribed in the papyrus. It but remained for me to perform the rite."

Barry sat stunned. There was no denying the utter sincerity of the man, the cold aloofness that denied disbelief. All of his scientific training and knowledge staggered under the impact of Anubis' words. If this were true—

"Barry!" the girl's voice was tremulous. "Can what he says be true?—Is that woman really the mummy—"

Barry didn't seem to hear her. His

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eyes were riveted to the features of Anubis. When he spoke, his voice was hoarse. "If this is true, why have you kept this knowledge to yourself?"

"There are things for which the world is not yet ready, things which it does not deserve except as a token of power by rightful users. This is one of them."

The words did not make sense to Barry. Anubis spoke of power, of strange secrets, of rightful users. What were these secrets? Who were the users? For what purpose? And how did the woman known as Zaleikka fit in? And Anubis himself?

Barry felt a hand touch his arm. The girl's fingers were cold, trembling. Her voice was tense.

"What do you expect us to do?" she asked.

Anubis fixed his gaze upon her. "I do not expect you to do anything, Miss Forrest. It is beyond that now. It is what I shall do, what I must do."

BARRY watched him lift the gun from the table. A chill ran through him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean simply that my plans have reached a crucial point. I can brook no opposition. If I were to release you both you would endeavor to bring official action against me, with or without just proof. Had you waited a day or so, your deaths would not now be necessary. I have a key that must be used within a fortnight. I regret having to kill you."

"You're mad!" Barry half rose from his chair.

"Sit down," Anubis had the gun leveled.

"You'll never be able to kill us and escape—the police—"

"Long before your bodies are discovered I shall be gone from this country. I plan to be in Egypt within the week. Even were I to be apprehended before that time, you forget that you are both trespassers. I believe your Western law provides for the defense of one's private property . . ."

It was the way he said it. The very manner about him—alien, sure, calculating. Barry knew he was going to shoot. He heard Joan Forrest's quick sob of fear. He saw the cold steadiness of Anubis' eyes, the whitening of his finger on the trigger.

Behind them a door suddenly slammed. A voice called out a sharp command. Barry didn't have to turn. He recognized that voice, even if he failed to grasp the words uttered in the Coptic tongue. It was the voice of Zaleikka!

Barry twisted around. She stood imperiously in the doorway, her head flung proudly back, her wide eyes smoldering with green fires. In her hands she carried a tray with cups and a steaming pot. Behind her Barry caught a glimpse of the guard whom Anubis had called Hassan.

It was an electric moment. Barry could feel the tension mount. His eyes flicked back to Anubis. A change had come over the man's features, there was sudden anger written there.

"What is the meaning of this, Zaleikka?" his voice was cold and brittle in the Coptic tongue. "I told you I would handle these intruders!"

She stared haughtily. "Do you treat them then with death?"

"I do what is necessary," he replied coldly. "You may hand that tray to Hassan—and leave . . ."

Barry sucked in his breath. He felt suddenly that this woman held a force over Anubis—that in her lay their only chance of remaining alive. He summoned all his knowledge of the ancient tongue and:

"I am told your name is Zaleikka. I am told you have slept through the

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ages. It was I who controlled the mummy that bore your name. For this, Anubis threatens us with death."

Barry heard the startled gasp that left Anubis' lips. But he had eyes only for the woman. A strange expression crossed her face. She glanced swiftly from Barry to the girl. He noted the change in her eyes when she looked at Joan. They grew resentful . . . She suddenly faced Anubis, walking into the room and laying the tray upon the desk.

"He speaks the ancient tongue. Is what he says true?"

ANUBIS nodded reluctantly, his eyes filled with anger as he glared at Barry. "Yes, but he and this girl would attempt to hinder us. It was for this that I decided they must die!"

Zaleikka looked at Barry. For a long moment she studied his features, and Barry had the feeling that she was looking not at him, but into him.

"What Anubis says is not the truth. How can we hinder something of which we are ignorant?"

She continued to gaze at him, and Barry felt himself flushing. There was something about her that mystified him, something that he had never felt before in the presence of any man—or woman.

"I believe he speaks the truth," Zaleikka turned back to Anubis. "I will not permit his death—now."

Anubis rose slowly from his chair, his face white with wrath.

"It is I who will make decisions!" he snapped. "You will do as I say!"

Zaleikka stiffened. The rapid rise and fall of her bosom beneath the filmy garment she wore was the only indication of the emotion racing through her.

"You are forgetting to whom you speak," she replied. "Your decisions mean nothing, without me. I am the key. Without me you are powerless."

Barry watched the clash of wills. A clash over something he could not understand. Her words lingered in his mind.—"I am the key,"—and he remembered something Anubis had said about a key, a key that must be used within two weeks. What did it mean?

There was a sudden clatter on the desk. Barry broke his thoughts and saw Anubis drop the gun. He saw him motion to Hassan standing just inside the door. The Egyptian's features were once again immobile, only his eyes showing the chagrin that smoldered deep within him.

"Take them upstairs, Hassan. See that they are locked securely in separate rooms. Upon your health and Allah's mercy see to it."

The guard saluted. *"Es-selâm 'aleykûm, Effendi!"*

At the point of the gun, which Barry knew Hassan would be only too willing to use, he and the girl walked slowly from the room. Even as he went, Barry could feel those strange smoldering eyes burning into him. Zaleikka was watching him, and the knowledge stirred him strangely . . .

BARRY paced nervously up and down the small confines of his room. For the tenth time he had tried the door and window with no avail. The door was locked from the outside, a sturdy oaken panel, and the window, facing out on the court, had an efficient metal shutter that was bolted securely in place.

Wearily he lit a cigarette and surveyed the room. It was obviously intended to be a guest bedroom. There was a small bureau, a number of lounge chairs, a small settee, and the bedstead itself; a door off to the right of the bureau led onto an adjoining bath from which he had already made certain there was no other exit.

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He found himself thinking of Joan, wondering if she were safe, and he suddenly realized that his concern for her ran deeply. Their rooms were spaced far apart, Hassan had seen to that. He had left the girl almost at the head of the second floor stairway. Barry could still feel the misty appeal of her eyes as he had left her.

"Damn!" he muttered, sinking on the edge of the bed and drawing deeply on his cigarette.

His thoughts grew moody as he passed over the rapid events of the past hours. What had started out to be a simple discovery of the stolen mummy, had turned into a weird drama of hidden and veiled menace. Barry pondered the questions that rose in his mind with a futile attempt at logical reasoning.

Who was this man called Anubis? Was the story he had sketched of himself the truth? Was he truly one of the ancient line of Egypt—had he actually found a papyrus at Karnak? Barry himself had walked through those stately marble ruins at Luxor. Was there such a crypt as Anubis alluded to? And Zaleikka . . .

The very thought of her name blotted any other thoughts from his mind. Was it possible that her slim youthful body had lain for ages as a mummy? Was she actually the mummy he had gazed on countless times in the museum? His mind rebelled. It was altogether fantastic—a woman over three thousand years old—alive!

And what was this strange cult over which Anubis presided? Was it all some mammoth hoax to get money from gullible wealthy patrons? Even granting that it were all true—what was the hidden purpose behind it all? Anubis spoke of a key, of time, of—

There was a soft sound behind him. It was the faint click of a latch. Barry spun around.

Zaleikka stood inside the room, her fingers on the closed door at her back!

"You!" Barry spoke in English, his pulse pounding strangely.

She stood silently watching him for a long moment. And once again Barry was aware of those eyes which were so incongruous to the youthfully exquisite face they gazed from. They were deep swirling pools, rushing with ancient flames . . .

BARRY felt a sudden surge of anger. He was acting like a child! It suddenly occurred to him that these people were deliberately trying to make a fool out of him. He rose stiffly from the bed.

"All right, lady, just what is this all about—who are you and why all this pretense?"

He realized even as he spoke, that the words sounded cheap and naive, and more so, that he had again spoken in English and from the puzzled look that passed over her features it was evident that she had not understood a word.

"There is anger in your words," she replied lowly, and Barry was once again reminded of warm rushing waters.

All the doubts and questions rose once again in his mind. But he realized that if this *were* a game, he had to play it *her* way for the present.

"What do you want?" he asked her, his words phrased in the ancient Coptic. "Does Anubis know you are here?"

She continued to stare at him. And slowly a smile crossed her face. It was the smile of a playful cat, toying with a mouse held powerless in its grasp.

"I see you are in doubt about me. I see many questions in your mind. You are wondering if it is possible that I am really Zaleikka, and you are wondering about my destiny."

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It was true. Even as she voiced the words, Barry realized it. He *had* been thinking just that. *But how had she known?* A chill ran through him.

"You are a strange man—Barry—I will show you the place of my destiny —and yours."

More than anything else, Barry noticed that she had used his name. But he failed to grasp the meaning of her words.

"Look into my eyes."

It was a command. But it wasn't necessary. Barry found his gaze riveted to hers. The green swirling depths of her eyes expanded, grew outward, until he seemed to be engulfed by them. He was lost in fiery whirlpools, his senses reeled, his vision blurred, and then—

His sight had suddenly cleared. But what he saw was no longer the room in the house of Doctor Anubis—he was gazing out over a vast sunlit plateau. The dazzling light of the sun for the moment blinded him. He seemed to be rushing through space toward the ground far below—to some pre-destined point. Vague looming shapes rose in his path. And then suddenly he knew what he was seeing!

It was the great plateau at Gizeh! And rising from the sand around him, it's shadow stretching far across the desert, it's eyes watching unseeing over the Valley of Life, stood what Barry had heard Bedouin tribesmen describe in hushed voices as the—"Father of Terror"—

It was the Sphinx!

CHAPTER V

I Am The Key

BARRY was unaware how long a time had passed before the vision faded. It might have been long minutes or a fleeting second. But when it did, and his eyes once more saw the room about him, he was startled to find himself no longer standing.

He was sitting again on the edge of the bed, and Zaleikka, a look of triumph on her features, was seated close beside him. The scent of Lotus blossoms struck him at her nearness.

"You are convinced—now?"

Her words roused him. Almost fearfully he looked again into her eyes. Everything in him rebelled—this was fantastic! He had actually *seen* the Sphinx! Good Lord, had Anubis been right?

"Tell me, what did you see?"

Barry nervously lit a cigarette. "The Sphinx," he replied slowly. "How did you do it—hypnotism?"

Zaleikka shook her head. "No, it is one of the secrets that died with my ancestors. I simply transported your mind to Egypt to show you—"

"You mean that *I was actually there?*"

She smiled. "Not in a physical sense. But you were there mentally."

"It's fantastic! How did you do it?"

She folded her hands in her lap. Had the surroundings been different, and had she been clad in modern garments, Barry felt that he might have been looking at an exquisite young girl of the modern world. Looking at her now —her skin soft and appealing, her body youthful with life—Barry saw something else. It was in her eyes, a glimpse of ages long past.

"How I do it is unimportant; what is more important is that you understand."

Barry sighed. "If I said I understood I'd be lying. How can I be expected to understand how a mummy that I personally know to be over three thousand years old, suddenly becomes endowed with life! But even granting that my doubts are shaken—why all this secre-

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cy? With your knowledge of ancient Egypt you could startle the world."

"Why bother to startle something you can rule."

"Rule?" The word slipped from Barry's lips as he stared at her. For a moment he failed to grasp the significance of her statement. But one look at her features, cold and imperious now, was eloquent answer without her reply.

"Yes—Barry—I said rule. For that is my destiny planned and carried out by the great Khafre and his Priests of Karnak. I am the key to the ancient science and might of Egypt. Through me the power of the Pharaohs will rise again!"

BARRY sat still, listening. The eyes of Zaleikka had drifted from him, seemed almost to be staring into some long forgotten memory. Even her voice carried a far off note, and Barry, watching her intently, felt his pulse leap. Was he going to learn at last something of the hidden meaning behind Anubis' words?

"I was born in the Temple of Karnak," she spoke again, almost as if she were reciting carefully chosen phrases from a history book. "My father was the High Priest Ammon Tankh, most powerful of all men but for the King himself. From childhood on I was reared and trained for the great mission, the experiment long planned by Khafre himself.

"The science of Egypt was great, and Khafre was a wise and powerful ruler. He and my father laid plans to preserve the might and power of the Pharaohs through the ages. It was unthinkable that Egypt, the Mother of Life should one day fall into obscurity. But such was the vision of the Priests of Karnak. They foresaw the fall of the dynasty and the rise of Western civilization and culture.

"Long had our science been utilized and perfected. We had solved the secret of body decay, we knew and developed the power of the mind and thought travel. We had weapons whose source of power sprang from Ammon Ra, the God of Light himself. But we had no need of them because none lived to challenge the majesty of Egypt.

"The Priests of Karnak studied deeply. They looked into the future to foretell the fall of Egypt. And this had to be averted. For this reason I was chosen, an obscure woman, a priestess. No one would look for the key in me, it was unthinkable to even suspect that a woman could hold the secret of the Pharaohs. In that lay the wisdom of our plan. Men of the future would rob and desecrate our dead. They would break into our burial vaults hunting for the secrets of our science and civilization. But they would fail, for many were the tracks left to lead them astray. And yet, there would be evidences left to give a clue. The pyramids of Seti, and Khafre among them. How were these massive structures built? I have seen some of your modern theories in books which Anubis has explained to me. You think we had tens of thousands of slaves working over a period of years. And even with this theory in mind you still fail to understand how huge pieces of stone could be vaulted into place by mere physical labor.

"I saw the second pyramid—the Temple of Khafre—built. It took but a week's time. The stone blocks were cut with rays of heat flame. They were lifted into place by machines, tiny as the palm of my hand, that deprived them of weight so that the blocks were as bubbles floating in the air.

"Your scientists of this age are fools! They depict us struggling through the centuries, a barbaric people. It is your

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modern age that is decadent! Our science, unlike yours, was not built on mechanical principles. Machines grow rusty, are cumbersome, fall apart. We studied and conquered the secrets of nature, of the Father of Life, the Sun. We drew our power from the primeval source, and it is indestructible.

"AND thus it but remained for the plan to be executed. Our science was great, our race the rightful rulers the weapons and power we had never of the World. The Priests of Karnak assembled the secrets of our science, used—weapons that can destroy entire cities in a moment's time! They were assembled in the Temple of Wisdom, and I was made ready for my role.

"A vault was to be built that would last through the ages. A vault so cleverly constructed that no man would suspect. It was to be a work of art for future people to ponder on, to examine, but yet fail to guess its purpose or discover its secret.

"Khafre built it wisely. Close to the great Pyramid at Ghizeh he erected a statue of a God-Man. He fashioned his own likeness on its face. Beneath it, deep within the sands at its feet, he built the vault.

"The power of our age was put in this vault, and the vault was then sealed. It was closed so securely that no man would ever discover it without the key. I was the key. I was taught the means of opening the vault, of releasing the hidden knowledge.

"And then I was sent into my long slumber. The fingers of time were to claim me, but not destroy me. I lived in my tomb, slumbering on, until the time for my awakening. But not even this was left to chance. Ammon Tankh, my father, secretly inscribed structions on a specially prepared papyrus. This papyrus was imbedded deep within Karnak, and clues were planted through the ceuturies to lead a descendant of the Temple Priests to it. Once the papyrus was found, it would lead the seeker to me, with the necessary means of awakening me.

"This has come about, as planned by Khafre and his Priests. I have been awakened, and my destiny is plain. I shall open the vault, and with true descendants of the ancient race, utilize the powers stored there to replace the might of the Pharaohs upon the world!"

IT had been a long discourse. Barry was hardly aware that her voice had trailed off into silence, so engrossed had he become. It was unbelievable, what she had said, utterly fantastic! But Barry suddenly realized with a cold grip of fear *that he believed her!* And if what he believed was true, the world, just painfully arising from the tangled debris of World War II, was about to be plunged into a third—more devastating, and worse, with no counter measures ready or conceivably possible to prevent it!

He was aware that her eyes were once again fixed upon him.

"You know now why I showed you the vault, Barry, in your vision."

He started. The vision—of course! He remembered her reference now to a god-man statue built by Khafre, the Sphinx! The eternal riddle of Egypt—the only human made structure standing through the ages unexplained! But if what she had told him were true, it was no longer a riddle, it was clear, terribly so, and it stood looming over the Nile as a menace to modern civilization! And this woman—so innocent and sweet in appearance—held the key to an arsenal that once unleashed would destroy the heroic labors of the world's leaders in establishing a peace

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that had been long fought for!

"There is fear on your face, Barry. Of what are you afraid?"

He looked at her and knew his face was pale. Of what was he afraid? Good Lord! She sat there, so demure and unconcerned, speaking of weapons that could destroy entire cities, of forces beyond modern comprehension, and she was unmoved!

"You can't do it, Zaleikka!" Barry found his voice strained.

Her delicate eyebrows arched. "What can't I do?"

"This—this whole mad scheme you've outlined to me—do you realize that the world is just getting over a major war? We're just now licking our wounds and you talk of plunging the world into another war!" He paused as a sudden thought struck him. "Or is this merely the plan of Anubis?"

Her lips smiled scornfully. "Anubis is but a tool I wield. I do not understand all these other words you say. I do not plan to throw the world into turmoil as you suggest. I am carrying out a destiny that was decided upon long centuries ago. Egypt must return to its place in the Sun. Nothing can stop this destiny. If the world chooses to resist . . ."

She shrugged her bared shoulders and Barry saw in the movement all the meaning her words tried to convey. She was cold, aloof, imperious to sympathy. She could not be swayed. She had been schooled well, reared in an age when life was cheap, when suffering was for those unfortunate enough to hinder the plans or progress of the ruling caste. And more than that, she was something alien, she didn't belong. Barry felt choked up inside. He knew now what Doctor Anubis had hinted at, why it had been important to get Joan Forrest and him out of the way. There was still time to wreck Anubis' plans! Had he given in to Zaleikka just to humor her? Or was there something else? . . .

HE WAS aware that he was staring at her with a fixed intensity. And he was equally aware that an amused smile was crossing her features. With an effort he pulled his gaze away.

"Tell me, Zaleikka, just why have you confided all this information to me? What is to prevent me from escaping and—"

"You cannot escape. You will never escape—Barry."

What did she mean? Why was she so sure? How did he possibly fit into the picture? Barry realized that there was no existing bond between him and this strange woman. He had come seeking only a mummy . . .

"What about Anubis?" he asked her. "Why didn't you let him kill me, why—"

"Anubis," Barry was surprised to hear her utter the word with scorn. "Anubis is an impostor. True he is descended from the ancient line of Egypt, but he is not descended from the Temple. He is a very wise man, this Anubis. By some means he found the secret of my awakening. I know he has the papyrus that was secreted in Karnak. He knows of the plan set forth by Khafre. He knows I am the key. I will let him continue because I need him now. I am in a strange land. I do not speak any modern tongue. I need his aid to reach the Valley of Life. Once there I will no longer need Anubis . . ."

Her voice trailed off but Barry knew what she had meant. She would use Anubis as long as she needed him, and then kill him with no compunction! The utter coldness of her sickened him. To his eye she was breath-takingly beautiful. But inside she was hard,

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grim, cruel.

"And what about me?" Barry asked icily, paused, and added: "And Miss Forrest."

Zaleikka's eyes grew thoughtful. "For you, Barry," her voice was low and vibrant, "I have personal plans. For the girl," she shrugged and Barry couldn't help but notice the emphasis she placed on the word *girl* as she paused, "she will be taken care of . . ."

"What are you getting at?" Barry asked frowning. "Just what plans do you have for me that Anubis hasn't?"

The Egyptian woman reached out a slender hand. Barry felt a warm tingling touch as her fingers brushed his. "Do you not find me—attractive, Barry?"

She was very close to him. Barry could feel the warm fragrance of her breath, and he was suddenly aware of a pounding in his throat. He thought of Joan Forrest, flashing blue eyes, copper gold hair, a pert upturned nose, and most of all, the simple honestness of her. Beside Joan, all the foreign exotic beauty of Zaleikka paled. But not when he looked into her eyes . . .

Her face was inches from his. Her lips were half parted, her small white even teeth twin rows of smooth ivory. And in her eyes, deep flickering pools of myrtle flame, he saw all the pent up emotions of three thousand years. He was suddenly engulfed by them, powerless to resist.

He wasn't aware his arms had tightened around her until her lips crushed against his. His senses swept away in a searing kiss of passionate flame. In that moment nothing mattered but Zaleikka—he wanted to hold her in his arms forever, closer, closer . . .

A cough sounded behind them.

Zaleikka broke away from Barry and whirled to her feet. She stood, eyes flashing, a red angry flush rushing to her face. And Barry followed her gaze toward the door.

Doctor Anubis stood silently on the threshold, watching them.

CHAPTER VI

You Cannot Escape Me

"WHAT is the meaning of this?" Zaleikka demanded coldly. "By what right do you spy on me?"

Anubis fixed frosty eyes on her. Barry noted that he was clad in a conventional pearl gray worsted. He watched for some expression on Anubis' face. There was none there.

"It would seem that I come just in time," Anubis replied quietly.

"You knew I was here!" Zaleikka stormed.

Anubis nodded.

"It is that pig, Hassan! He ran straight to you!"

"Hassan is my most able assistant. He acts only in the best interests of our cause."

"He is a pig! If this were in the court of Khafre I would have him flayed!"

It was the first real show of emotion Barry had seen Zaleikka display. The flush had left her features, leaving them a pale ivory. Her whole body trembled in anger. Barry glanced quickly at Anubis. His back was to the open door. The hallway beckoned enticingly. If he could reach it . . .

Anubis put his right hand in his coat pocket. There was a significant bulge. Anubis flashed a warning glance at Barry. "Stay where you are, Mr. Randall." Then he looked back at the Egyptian woman. "I am sorry you feel angry with Hassan. I can assure you, Zaleikka, that he is one of your most devoted followers. Even now he is on an important errand for us that

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will allow us to begin our journey."

His words seemed to have a soothing effect on Zaleikka. Barry guessed that it was not so much the words, as the absence of the anger she had expected. As Barry himself had experienced in the study earlier, the utter calm of this man defeated Zaleikka.

"And now, I would like a few words with Mr. Randall—alone."

Zaleikka lifted her head imperiously. She walked swiftly past Anubis and out the door. Once outside she turned swiftly and Barry caught the full impact of her eyes. There was a message written there, but before he could catch it, she was gone.

"And now, Mr. Randall."

Barry swung his gaze back to Anubis. He had shut the door with his free hand and stood with his back to it.

Barry got up slowly from the edge of the bed. He was aware suddenly that his hands were moist with sweat. Had Anubis been standing outside in the hall all along? How much had he heard?

"A very touching scene, Mr. Randall, I must compliment you. You sought to gain Zaleikka as an ally behind my back. But then, women have always been fools where men are concerned, even a woman three thousand years old." He took a silver cigarette case from his left coat pocket and proferred it. "Cigarette? They are of Egyptian tobacco, I prefer them."

Barry shook his head.

"You seem nervous, Mr. Randall," Anubis flicked the lighter on the cigarette case and then pocketed it. His eyes, cold and steady, never left Barry. Wisps of smoke streamed from his delicate nostrils.

BARRY took a step forward. "Just how long are you going to hold me here?" he demanded. "And what about Miss Forrest?"

"Ah. But rest your fears, Mr. Randall, I will not detain you long—now."

Anger surged inside Barry. This man was so *sure* of himself. Had he really heard Zaleikka? He took another step.

"It would be best if you stood still, Mr. Randall. I have no desire to hasten your death. In the meantime, now that you understand my goal, we can talk intelligently."

Barry stopped. "So you *did* hear what Zaleikka told me!"

"Yes, Mr. Randall, I heard."

"I thought you wanted to keep this secret—why didn't you stop her before this?"

"You underestimate me, my friend. Before I had only personal reasons for wanting to kill you. Zaleikka, by her brief feminine whimsy has provided me with a necessity. I will now be able to place the blame on her hands."

Barry had met many men in his life. But he knew, as he stood facing Anubis, that he had never met a man so cunning, with such a cold disregard for anyone who stood in his way.

"Tell me, Mr. Randall, as an Egyptologist of no little repute, how does the solving of the world's most perplexing riddle strike you?"

Barry knew he was referring to the Sphinx, and he felt his blood chill. For the moment his own peril was swept away.

"Anubis, you can't go through with this—it's mad, insane!"

Anubis' eyebrows arched a fraction. "Mad? To the contrary, it is the most logical plan ever devised by man, and the Pharaohs were of the wisest. With the science of my ancestors at my disposal, I will place Egypt in her rightful place among the world's nations! And that gave birth to man should rule over him?"

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Barry laughed. "Don't you mean that it's only right that *you* should gain power?"

"It is useless to taunt me, Mr. Randall, before the month is gone, the world will feel my presence."

"But don't you know what you're doing, man? You're planning to throw the world into war! If the Egyptians really had weapons of strange power, you'll cause millions of people to suffer! And don't forget in your smug confidence that another little man like you tried to conquer the world and failed!"

A TIGHTENING of his lips was the only show Anubis made of his emotions. But Barry saw the flame that leaped in his eyes. He was dangerous. More dangerous than Hitler and his Nazi hordes had ever been. Suddenly he remembered something.

"Maybe Zaleikka will have something to say about your plans!"

A smile crossed Anubis' pale features. "There are some things you do not know, Mr. Randall. Some things that even Zaleikka does not know. I believe she mentioned to you a certain papyrus written by Ammon Tankh?"

Barry nodded, frowning.

Anubis went on. "Ah, yes, you recall it. The wisdom of the Priests of Karnak took in all eventualities. Rest assured that *I* hold the whiphand—even over Zaleikka. I fear nobody, least of all, her."

Despair gripped Barry's heart. Was there no checkmate to Anubis? And what made him so sure he controlled Zaleikka? What was in the papyrus that the Egyptian woman didn't know?

"And now, Mr. Randall, I am afraid we must part. My time is very limited. It will be so for the next two weeks. I regret that you will have no part in it."

Barry watched as Anubis took his right hand from his coat pocket. There was a gun in it.

"You wouldn't dare shoot me! Zaleikka will—"

"Zaleikka will forget you — soon. Goodbye, Mr. Randall."

"Wait!" Barry felt his heart pounding.

"Wait? For what? I believe everything has been said."

"You offered me a cigarette before—I'd like one now."

Anubis stared coldly at him. Then his features relaxed into a smile. "Asking for time will get you nothing. But," he shrugged, "I can see no harm in a last request—here." He stepped over to a side table next to the bed. He laid the silver cigarette case on it. Barry walked slowly over to the table. Anubis was careful to keep distance between them.

"Touch nothing but the cigarette case," he warned.

Barry picked up the case with a trembling hand. He opened it and took out one of the long Egyptian cigarettes. He flicked the lighter on, drew in sweet mild smoke.

"You have had your wish. I can delay no longer."

Barry blew out a cloud of smoke and tensed. Anubis was but a few feet away, the gun was pointed straight at Barry's heart. He could see the slender finger tightening on the trigger.

"Here's your cigarette case, Anubis." Barry tried to make his voice casual. He started to hold out his hand. For the barest fraction of a second, Anubis' eyes flicked down to the proferred case. Barry had been waiting for that moment. With a single motion he jumped sideways and hurled the case at Anubis' head.

IT struck him in the forehead. He let out a sharp cry and his arms flew up

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instinctively. Barry dove upon him in almost the same moment. His fists lashed out against the classic features in a smashing barrage. Anubis staggered back.

Barry felt a sudden pain in his head. Anubis had managed to free his arm and was lashing out with the butt of the gun. Barry ducked another blow and kicked up with his knee.

Anubis let out a groan and doubled up. The gun slipped from his fingers and skidded off across the floor under the bed. Then he had Barry around the knees and they crashed to the floor.

Somehow Anubis got his fingers around Barry's throat. Barry felt his head pound as he struggled to break the grip. But he couldn't. There was a grip of steel in those fingers. In desperation, Barry lashed out with every bit of strength he possessed. He felt his fist pound into Anubis' face, felt flesh and bone crack. And the fingers tightened.

Blood pounded in Barry Randall's head. His senses whirled, he felt his eyes bulging from their sockets. Then somehow his hands closed over Anubis' head. In a last frantic struggle as his consciousness whirled, Barry lifted the Egyptian's head off the floor and smashed it down. There was a dull thump, a groan, and Anubis grew limp beneath him.

Barry staggered blindly to his feet, his breath coming in tortured gasps. Blood was trickling down his temple from a gash on his head. He stared dumbly down at Anubis. The man lay, still and silent, his face swollen and bruised.

Only one thought pounded through Barry's mind. *"Got to get out—police —Joan . . ."*

He rushed over to the door, and then paused, listening. There was no sound other than his own labored breathing. What about Hassan, the guard? Then he remembered, Anubis had said Hassan had been sent on an errand. Swiftly Barry opened the door, and then he was out in the hall. He closed and locked the door behind him, pocketing the key.

THE hall was deserted. Only a faint aroma of incense permeated the air about him. He paused to collect his thoughts. Joan. He *must* find Joan. A momentary fear crossed his mind. Good Lord—maybe Anubis had been to her room first!

He sped down the long hall. He remembered the room Hassan had locked the girl in at the head of the stairway. It was closed, the key turned in the lock.

His fingers trembling, Barry unlocked the door. He threw it open, almost afraid to look—

She was sitting on the edge of a chaise longue, staring straight ahead at the door. Her fingers were folded closely in her lap. Barry let out a sigh of relief.

"Joan! Thank God you're safe—Come on, we're getting out of here, I just—"

He came up alongside her, and stopped. His words broke off in midsentence. She was still staring at the door! She gave no indication of having seen or heard him.

"Joan!" Barry breathed hoarsely. He dropped to his knees beside her and turned her face toward him. Her wide blue eyes looked into this, unseeing. Slowly her lips moved.

"Who—are—you?"

"Who am I?" Barry hissed the words dumbfounded. "Joan, what's happened?"

"Happened? — I — don't — understand . . ."

Barry got slowly to his feet. Good

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God! Anubis had been here! But what *had* he done to her? She wasn't aware of anything! Gently he took her hand.

"Come with me, Joan, we've got to get out of here."

She looked up as him slowly. "No— I — want — to — stay. — Zaleikka — needs — me . . ."

"Zaleikka!" Barry's mind reeled. Of course! Zaleikka was responsible for this. She had put the girl in some kind of a hypnotic trance! He tightened his grip on the girl's fingers and pulled her slowly to her feet. She didn't resist.

It was like guiding a walking automaton. The girl's fingers were limp in his grasp, her footsteps halting, unsure.

As he guided her slowly from the room and down the stairs, Barry kept a nervous eye on the vestibule below. There was bound to be one or more of Anubis' men down there. In the dim light from the shaded fixture in the hall ceiling, the massive door leading to freedom seemed a thousand miles away.

HIS eyes took in every shadow, every object in sight, as they reached the landing. There was a hat rack beside the door, and a cane stand with a number of heavy sticks. He suddenly wondered where their hats and coats were. It was so ludicrous that he nearly laughed. "At a time like this I worry about a hat!" he muttered.

The girl was beside him as he put his hand on the door knob. Suddenly a high pitched scream sounded behind them.

Barry whirled. He glanced up the staircase.

Zaleikka stood at the head of the landing staring down at them.

From somewhere close by Barry heard a door slam. He swore and twisted savagely on the knob. The door swung open. He pushed the girl through it. Behind him he heard Zaleikka.

"Stop!"

A door off to the side of the hall opened. A man came running. Barry saw him coming and tensed. It was one of the men Anubis had had with him at the museum!

There was no time to think. The guard was tugging at a shoulder holster and a gun was sweeping into view. Barry's eye caught the cane rack.

In a single movement he swept one of the heavy sticks from the stand. He swung it over his head and threw it.

The guard saw it coming with a surprised look. He tried to dodge, but was too late. The stick struck him a glancing blow on the forehead. He continued running forward for a second, and then collapsed to the floor. Down the hall, Barry heard other feet running.

He whirled back to the door. Joan Forrest was standing on the threshold, her eyes staring up the staircase, her face a rapt mask of emotions. Barry followed her gaze.

Zaleikka blared down at him.

"She is lost to you—forever! Only *I* can release her! You cannot escape me, Barry—*you cannot escape!*"

And Barry Randall rushed from the house of Doctor Anubis, slamming the door behind him. He had Joan's hand gripped firmly in his as he led her, running along the driveway, to the open gates ahead—and freedom . . .

CHAPTER VII

The Vision

POLICE Inspector Gerald Merton sat wearily behind his desk in headquarters. The cold cheerless light of early dawn filtered in through the windows opposite him. Across the desk,

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Barry Randall sat tensely forward in a chair, rapidly outlining his story.

Inspector Merton listened attentively, regretting the fate that had called him from a comfortable bed. If it had been anyone but John Randall's son, he would have told him to go to hell, but the friendship he had had with John Randall dated back to school days many years back. He sighed wistfully to himself as he thought of this and listened at the same time.

"And that's about all I can tell you, Inspector," Barry finished. "I took Joan,—Miss Forrest, over to Doctor Holland's home, and got in touch with you as soon as I could."

Merton leaned across his desk. He brushed a hand

Zaleikka had her eyes fastened on the still figure of the girl as she sat staring trance-like up at her

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slowly across his well-kept, gray hair, and scowled.

"Do you mean you dragged me out of bed at five in the morning to tell me a fantastic story like this? Barry, I'm disappointed in you."

Barry got to his feet angrily. "I came to you because you're an old friend of the family. You should know me better than to think I'd waste your time with what you call a fantastic tale! I'm sorry I bothered you." He turned to go.

Merton stared at him for a long moment. Then he sighed. "All right, Barry, sit down and get off your high horse. I'll admit I'm skeptical, if it was anyone else but you I'd throw him out. Now let's see." He drummed his fingers lightly on the desk top. Barry sat down again, waiting.

"Now let's see if I've got this business straight. You say that yesterday afternoon a mummy disappeared from the museum. You had noticed these particular people hanging around it for some time. You traced a glove that had been left, to a Doctor Anubis of Wilton Place. You went there, met this girl reporter, got inside, witnessed a strange rite, and saw a woman named Zaleikka who claimed to be the mummy that vanished from your museum. Right?"

Barry nodded.

"Then you were forcibly detained by this Anubis, and he threatened to kill you. Later you heard from the woman herself about this Egyptian business." He sighed wearily. "Barry, I'm afraid it's way over my head. You don't actually believe that nonsense, do you?"

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BARRY forced himself to remain calm. "Gerald, I'm an Egyptologist. I've spent years in the study of Egypt. I've seen things that modern science has no answer for. Until last night I had to accept them at their face value. Now I can't do that. If all this is as fantastic as you say, then how do you explain the disappearance of the mummy? How do you explain that this woman Zaleikka spoke only *Coptic?* And most of all, how do you explain the fact that Joan,—Miss Forrest, has been put under some kind of spell? She *is* under a hypnotic influence! I myself experienced the same thing at the hands of Zaleikka, and I believe that I can truthfully say I have a strong will, not easily influenced!"

The inspector shrugged. "All right, granting that there is something screwy, what can I do?"

"I want you to investigate it. In fact, you've *got* to stop them from leaving. Just consider that what I've told you *may* be true! Can't you see what a danger would arise? The whole safety of the world might be at stake."

Merton was silent for a few moments. Then he pulled open a drawer and pushed a paper across the desk at Barry.

"All right, Barry, I'll see what I can do, but I'll have to have a signed complaint by you. I'll book him for abduction, suspicion of theft, and intent to kill with a deadly weapon. Sign here."

Barry took a proffered pen and scrawled his name on the sheet. Merton stood up. "Now if I were you I'd check with Doctor Holland on the condition of the girl. The evidence he submits will be valuable in case I need it."

Barry breathed a sigh of relief. He nodded and grasped Merton's hand. "Thanks, Inspector, I'm going over there right now. Don't waste any time on this."

Merton grinned. "They're practically under arrest right now."

BARRY paid off the cab driver and strolled up the walk. Doctor Stephen Holland, Chicago's most successful psychiatrist, lived in a sedate mansion on North Sheridan Road. A grave faced butler opened the door a few moments after Barry rang.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Randall. Come right in, sir."

Barry walked in. The butler closed the door behind him. "If you will follow me, sir, Doctor Holland is upstairs with the patient."

Barry followed him silently. Presently they came to a closed door on the second floor. The butler knocked.

The door opened and a tall, distinguished man in his early fifties, peered out.

"What is it, Reynolds?—Oh, it's you, Randall! Come in, please."

Barry walked into the room. It was a bedroom, simply but comfortably furnished. On the bed, staring vacantly at the ceiling, lay Joan Forrest. Barry sucked in his breath as he looked at her lying there. He turned anxiously.

"Doctor Holland, how is she?"

The doctor walked up to the bed. He stared down at the girl for a moment, then turned. His face had a frown.

"I don't know what to make of it, Randall. I've given her a thorough examination since you brought her here. I must confess I'm puzzled. The girl is perfectly normal, physically. Her Romberg reflexes are normal, her heart action, pulse, and general physical conditions. But her mind—from what you told me earlier, I immediately suspected hypnosis. She reacts more like a shock victim, but I have to rule that out.

"And if she is under a hypnotic spell,

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it is one I have never come in contact with. She answers questions rationally when put to them, but doesn't remember who she is or anything prior to meeting someone she calls Zaleikka. The only diagnosis I can give is a cross between amnesia and hypnotic influence—something I have never seen before!"

Barry sat down on the bed and took one of the girl's hands in his. He looked desperately up at the doctor.

"Isn't there something you can do to snap her out of it?"

"I've tried everything from counter hypnosis to shock. It's useless. If what you told me is true about this woman whom Miss Forrest keeps mentioning, well, while I hesitate to say it, I believe that only she can break the trance."

BARRY groaned. He had told the doctor only the barest essentials. That a foreign woman, whom they had been investigating, had somehow put the girl in a trance. He didn't dare reveal more.

"Why—am—I—here?"

Barry stared down at the girl She was looking at him, her features stoic, immobile. Her eyes seemed to be looking through him instead of at him.

"Joan, don't you remember anything?" Barry leaned over her.

"Remember? — What — should — I — remember?"

Doctor Holland sighed. "You see? It is just as I said."

Barry got up slowly from the bed. He paced the room nervously. "What can we do, doctor—it may be some time before the police arrest Zaleikka!"

"The police?" Doctor Holland's eyebrows arched.

"Yes, you may as well know, this girl and I were caught by members of a new cult. The police are on the trail now."

"I see. Then there is nothing to do but wait."

"But will she be all right?"

Holland shrugged. "I see no reason for any change. At any rate, there is nothing more I can do here. I would suggest you take her home, keeping me posted of course should there be any change. I will see that a trained nurse is assigned to the case."

"Home?" Barry frowned. He didn't know where she lived! He could call her paper, the *Blade*, and find out, but he decided he wanted her as close as possible until Merton could contact him.

"I'll take her to my apartment," he announced. "I expect prompt action by the police, and it will be easier that way. You say you can send a trained nurse?"

Doctor Holland nodded. "Yes. Leave your address with me and I'll have one sent over immediately."

Barry gave it to him and moments later was leading the girl from the room. A lump rose in his throat as he felt her limp fingers inside his.

THE Field Museum was just opening for the day when Barry Randall arrived. As he walked up the steps his mind went back twenty-four hours. He had never thought yesterday morning when he walked up these same steps that within a day he would be involved in a weird plot of world threatening peril. He wouldn't have believed that a beautiful young girl's life and sanity hung in his hands. But that had been twenty-four hours ago. Barry's thoughts lingered with Joan. He had left her in his apartment under the watchful eye of the nurse Doctor Holland had sent over. There was nothing to do now but wait for Merton to act.

"Good morning, Mr. Randall."

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Barry looked up. Slim was standing just inside the entrance.

"Morning, Slim," Barry started to pass him.

"Mr. Randall."

Barry turned. "Yes?"

Slim had a worried look on his face. "Doctor Slater came in this morning. He knows about the mummy disappearance. He asked to see you as soon as you came in."

Barry nodded glumly. "Thanks, Mike."

He approached the Curator's office slowly. A new worry clouded him. It was only a week until the Board of Directors met to choose a new Curator. Would this theft, occurring while he had been in charge, affect his selection? He opened the door.

Doctor Slater, Curator of the Museum, sat stiffly behind his desk, busily adjusting a pair of pinch glasses on his thin peaked nose. He was a slight, stoop-shouldered man in his late sixties. His hair, long and white, was an unkempt mass framing his head. He stopped fussing with the glasses as Barry walked into the room.

"Oh! It's you, Randall. I want to see you—what is all this mystery about that Egyptian mummy?"

Barry walked up to the desk and sank into a comfortable chair. He pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and began the same story he had told Merton. When he finished, he crushed out the cigarette butt. Then he watched the expression on the Curator's face.

"You mean to say she spoke *Coptic?*"

Barry nodded. Slater drummed his fingertips on the desk.

"You are absolutely certain about this?"

"As certain as I am of sitting here talking to you."

"Hmmm. This puts an entirely different complexion on the matter. Ah, I refer of course to the question of theft. If what you have told me is true, Randall, we here at Field's may be responsible for entirely revolutionizing Egyptology!"

BARRY grinned ruefully. "Doctor, it isn't so much what *we* may revolutionize, as what *they* might do if allowed to continue!"

The Curator paused. "Yes, I had quite forgotten for the moment. My boy, I can't get over it—a priestess of Karnak alive! My soul! We must demand that the police turn her over to us!"

Barry nodded absently. Yes, there would be plenty of time for that after—

The telephone on Slater's desk jangled.

The Curator picked up the receiver. "Yes? Who? Randall? Just a minute," he held out the receiver. "It's for you."

Barry took the phone. "Hello?"

Merton's voice came over the phone: "I've got bad news, Barry. I've just come from Wilton Place. Anubis is gone, and so is that woman, Zaleikka."

"What?" Barry straightened in his chair. "You know what this means? We've got to stop them—check the depots and airports—"

"I've already done that!" Merton snapped. "They took the three o'clock plane from the Municipal airport. I've already wired New York, and their plane took off for Egypt a half hour ago!"

"My God!" Barry breathed. Across from him Doctor Slater was listening attentively, his fingers fumbling with his glasses. Watching him, Barry felt his heart sink. "What can we do?"

Merton's voice was brisk. "The case is out of my hands now, but we got a

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break. I checked with the New York Foreign office. The woman was registered under a passport issued to a Madame Zalon. It was obviously a forgery. The F.B.I. is working on it. I'll call you when I get any further news."

"Thanks," Barry said hollowly and replaced the phone. He sat still and stunned for long moments. Across from him, Doctor Slater fidgeted.

"What was that? Have they found them?"

"They're gone." Barry replied. "They left New York a half hour ago on the Egyptian Clipper."

Slater's mouth dropped open. "But they must be stopped! Once they get to Egypt it will be too late!"

"I know that!" Barry snapped. "But there's nothing we can do now! Unless . . ."

"Yes?"

"Look here, sir, this is something big, bigger than anything you or I can even imagine. It all started here in the museum, and technically we are responsible. I'd like to follow up on this—with your permission."

"Of course, of course! By all means, Randall. But what can *you* do?"

Barry set his lips grimly. "I don't know—yet."

"Hmmm. That girl, Randall, that Miss Forrest, do you suppose she is all right now that Zaleikka is gone?"

Barry's heart leaped. Joan! He had nearly forgotten about her. He got up swiftly. "That's one of the things I'm going to find out!" he said.

Slater was adjusting his glasses as Barry left.

SHE stared at him with a lost expression. "Why—am—I—here?"

Barry's shoulders sagged. Beside him, the nurse shook her head sadly.

"That's all she's been saying, sir, ever since you left. That and a strange name, somebody called Zaleikka."

Barry nodded wearily. He had thought it might be different. He had hoped that with the going of the strange Egyptian woman, the spell would have been broken. But it wasn't. Though Zaleikka was now thousands of miles away, and getting further with each passing moment, her control over the girl reporter remained.

"Leave me for awhile with her," he told the nurse.

After the door had closed he sat down on the edge of the bed and took one of the girl's hands in his. Her fingers were soft and warm. Something rose inside him that was an ache. Looking down on her, her mind controlled by a woman endowed with the powers of a lost age, Barry felt suddenly helpless. What could *he* do?

Her eyes were on his. Barry leaned over her. For the barest moment it seemed as if her sight had cleared, as if she suddenly were able to see him!

"Barry. . . ."

The word slipped slowly from her parted lips. Barry tensed.

"Joan! Joan!"

And then it was gone. The vacantness was in her stare, the hopeless yearning. But Barry felt his pulse leap. She had called his name! Zaleikka's influence had passed for the slightest moment! And there had been a message in the girl's eyes. A vibrant pleading, her soul calling out to him.

Emotion swept through him. He suddenly had her in his arms. Her lips were yielding and warm under his. Almost it seemed, as if she responded. He held her close to him in a fierce embrace. His heart called out to her, his kiss burning on her mouth.

And it happened.

IT HAD happened before. His senses reeled, his mind blurred,

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and—

He was holding Zaleikka against him! Her lips were searing irons on his!

There was no space, no time, no reality. There was nothing but Zaleikka in his arms. Everything else was a whirl of motion, of sight and sound. He seemed to be drifting in an ether space of unreality. He fought, revulsion swept through him, but he could not defeat it. Nothing mattered but Zaleikka.

And then her lips tore away from his. Her eyes were swimming pools of myrtle flame from which he could not escape.

"Barry—you are mine! You cannot escape me! This girl does not matter—together, you and I will rule the world! Forget her—she is lost to you forever—come to me, I shall be waiting for you—come to me—Egypt calls us—you cannot escape!"

Her words rung in his mind. And then her face was close to his again, her lips parted, beckoning . . .

A loud jangling sound rose from somewhere. It grew louder.

Barry groaned. His mind suddenly cleared. He was holding Joan Forrest close against him.

The jangling grew louder.

The telephone!

Dazedly Barry released the girl. She lay back, still and quiet against the pillow. A deep color had transformed her features but her eyes were vacant. Barry shuddered and clenched his fists in agony.

The door opened slowly and the nurse came in.

"Shall I answer, sir?"

Barry got up from the bed. "Never mind, I'll take it," he said. His voice was strained. The nurse looked at him strangely for a moment, then closed the door.

Barry picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Merton. I called you at the museum, but Slater said you went home. How's the girl?"

"The same," Barry said.

"Too bad. Listen, I've got news. You remember I told you the F.B.I. had stepped in? Well, I've given them the whole story. Naturally they don't believe it, but they're taking no chances. A special agent is being assigned to work the case out of Chicago. He'll probably leave on the evening plane for New York and Egypt. This thing may have international complications. His name is Craig Dalton. Thought I'd let you know."

Barry clenched the phone in a grip of steel. His eyes were fastened on the still figure of Joan Forrest.

"Merton! Listen to me, I want you to get me two seats on that plane! I'm going with Dalton, and I'm taking Joan along with me!"

"What? Are you crazy? What the—"

"Don't argue with me, Gerald, I know what I'm doing! I've got to get to Egypt—I can't explain why, but I know more about this case than anyone else! You've got to help me!"

There was a long sustained pause. Then:

"I'll see what I can do, but I think you're making a mistake."

"Our mistake will come if we get there too late. Thanks, Gerald."

Barry replaced the phone with a trembling hand. He was suddenly aware that his clothes were wet with a cold sweat. A shiver swept through him. His feet were leaden weights as he moved over beside the bed.

He looked down at Joan. But he didn't see her. He saw Zaleikka. And he heard the words—*You cannot escape me—you cannot escape!*

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CHAPTER VIII

Cairo

FROM the terrace balcony of Shepheard's Hotel, Barry Randall sat at a table with a small pot of Arab coffee before him, waiting for Craig Dalton to come down from his room. He gazed moodily out over the ancient city and felt that strange thrill creep over him that only Cairo, City of the Caliphs, could produce.

Out amongst those spires and minarets he knew there was life going on that had changed little in the ensuing centuries. Many times before he had walked through narrow winding streets and overleaning houses reminiscent with the strange musky odors of the East. There would be vendors there, of fly whisks, of Birmingham wares, sellers of lemonade jangling their copper and tin cups, old men astride ancient donkeys, stacks of carpets and *mushrabîyeh* furniture, and the whining vendors of aged scarabs and hand pounded silver and gold jewelry. And somewhere out there too, Doctor Anubis would be in hiding, preparing, waiting for the moment when Zaleikka would lead him to the secrets and power of the ancients. And with Zaleikka lay the fate of Joan Forrest.

Barry winced inwardly. The thought of Joan had freshened his memory of the past days. The hurried flight from Chicago with the Special Agent, Craig Dalton, and the girl. The time had sped swiftly enough. He had been kept busy explaining everything he knew to Dalton. That part had been easy enough, explaining. But Barry burned secretly when he recalled the cynical comments Dalton had made:

"Thanks for the story, Randall—mark me, no offense meant, but you must admit that's a little too much to swallow. Understand, the only reason I've been sent on this mission is to check on this man Anubis. His passport, and that of the woman he took with him, were evident forgeries. Since the war we can't afford to take any chances on suspected aliens. The Egyptian government will cooperate with us. But that's as far as I go. Frankly, I think you've made a mistake in coming along."

Barry sipped slowly on his coffee as he remembered. Yes, Merton too had said the same things. But could either of them explain the condition of Joan Forrest? Could they solve the mystery of the missing mummy? It was too easy to scoff. But Barry knew it went deeper than that. And so did Joan . . . Or did she? Was she aware of what had happened to her? Was her will completely suppressed? Would she ever remember?

"Will there be anything else, sir?"

BARRY looked up abruptly. A white robed, red capped waiter stood expectantly by. Barry glanced briefly at his stoic eastern features and turned his gaze back to the street.

"No, nothing more," he replied.

"Does the coffee suit your taste, sir?"

Barry sighed and was about to offer the tip that had been subtly suggested when his eyes focused on the sidewalk below him.

A man was standing down there staring up at the hotel. A man with pale classic features, discernible even at a distance. Slowly his face turned toward the terrace and Barry felt, rather than saw, the piercing gaze that was fastened upon him.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?"

Barry twisted around and became aware that he had half risen from his seat. The waiter gazed at him questioningly.

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Only a moment did Barry glance at the waiter, then his eyes fled back to the street below. "Anubis—it's Anubis!" he exclaimed.

"Who, sir? I don't—"

Barry kicked the chair back in his haste. He grabbed the waiter by the arm. "Quick, get the police—we've got to stop him!"

"Police?" The waiter stepped back uncertainly. His eyes stared incredulously at Barry.

In the street below, Barry saw Anubis turn away suddenly.

"Out of my way!" Barry said roughly, shoving the startled waiter aside. "I've got to catch him!"

He ran through the crowded tables, oblivious of the commotion he was causing behind him. He reached the stairway leading to the street. Huge ornamental vases lined the railings, obscuring his view of the sidewalk below.

Somebody got in his way. Barry sidestepped and felt his shoulder jostle the man. Startled oaths sounded behind him, and then he was on the sidewalk, racing around to the terrace side.

He stopped, breathing hard. Anubis was gone.

For long moments he stood there. And his eyes caught sight of a car disappearing down the street. Anubis was in it—he had to be!

"What's the trouble here?"

Barry turned slowly. A *tarbushed* Moslem police officer was hurrying up, the waiter and a disgruntled hotel guest beside him.

"He came running down the steps like a madman!" the guest blustered. "Damn near killed me!"

"He saw something down in the street and ordered me to get the police—to catch somebody!" the waiter added.

The police officer stared at Barry. "Well? What is this all about?"

Barry stifled his emotions. It was too late now, Anubis was gone. "I'm very sorry," he apologized. "I thought I recognized a man who tried to rob me a short while back. I was mistaken," he completed lamely.

"Oh?" The officer was skeptical.

"I'm sure I can repair any damage I've done," Barry added, glancing at the hotel guest. The man sniffed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you wish to make a report about—this man?" Barry caught the obvious suspicion in the officer's words.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to give a very accurate description. As I said before, I'm sorry if I caused any trouble."

HE BREATHED easier when they turned and left him. It had been a close call. He had had Anubis practically in his hands. He cursed himself for the stupid way he had handled it. If he hadn't started that disturbance Anubis might not have been warned. Wearily he turned back toward the hotel.

"What's been going on out here?"

Craig Dalton met Barry on the steps of the hotel. He was a tall man, suave, well poised, with crisp curling grayed hair and steely blue eyes. His light tan tropical worsted suit was neatly pressed.

Barry recounted what had happened in morose tones. Dalton listened quietly, only his eyes showing interest. They hardened.

"That was a foolish thing to do, Randall. You should have slipped away quietly and called me."

"I know," Barry spoke dismally, "but it happened so fast—at least we know he's here!"

"And he knows we're here," Dalton added. He frowned thoughtfully for a moment. "What did you do with the

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girl?"

"She's up in her room, the hotel supplied a matron to take care of her. You don't suppose Anubis—"

"I'm not supposing anything. We've got to act fast. I've been ironing out diplomatic details through our Consulate. I've got an appointment with the Egyptian Home Minister, Abdul Ben Achmed. If we can get quick action we'll have this Anubis before nightfall. Come on."

Barry followed him hopefully into a cab. But his thoughts were not all pleasant. He was remembering the words of Zaleikka. And he was thinking of Joan Forrest, helpless. They *had* to get action. Anubis himself had said his time was short. Barry remembered this and wondered again what the Egyptian had meant.

Dalton was whistling confidently beside him . . .

—

BARRY SAT in the luxurious office, his nerves tense, and his emotions barely concealed. The discussion had been going on for over a half hour, in the typically Eastern method. There were innumerable Egyptian cigarettes smoked, and countless cups of aromatic Arab coffee, combined with the most inane of comments and discussions. Barry fretted secretly, but knew from his past experiences in the East that nothing could change it. Business was carried on in the guise of social entertainment. It would have been an insufferable breach of etiquette to barge into the Home Minister's office and state their case with no preamble of cigarettes, coffee, and small talk.

Seated across from him, Craig Dalton was finishing the last of his coffee. Across from them Barry watched Abdul Ben Achmed, a slight man with the barest hint of a moustache, and the customary red felt and black tasseled *fez* settled firmly on his head, crush out the butt of a half smoked cigarette and immediately light another.

"And, gentlemen, as I understand it, you wish information of a certain man known as Anubis, and his party."

Barry breathed a sigh of relief, being careful to mask it by straightening in his chair. He listened while Dalton smoothly added details, as if it had been the matter under discussion all along.

"I see," the Minister replied. "And you wish us to help in apprehending this man."

Dalton nodded. For a moment silence fell. Then the Egyptian reached out to a call box on his desk and pressed a button.

Seconds later a door opened and a bespectacled clerk entered with a clipped report. He handed it to the Minister and silently left.

After the door had closed: "You see, gentlemen, that we are not idle. I have here the report from the airport, consisting of a list of every passenger on the plane, his or her point of origin, and business in Egypt. I took immediate action when your Consulate contacted me."

Barry automatically revised his opinion of eastern efficiency. He sat forward expectantly.

Achmed studied the sheets for a moment, and frowned. "I'm afraid I don't understand—there is no party on board named Anubis. There is a Doctor Ahmes and his niece and servants—but that is all. Here, see for yourself."

Barry rose from his chair and peered over Craig Dalton's shoulder. He scanned the entire passenger list. It was true! There was no listing of Anubis nor of Zaleikka under the forged passport of Madame Zalon!

Dalton slapped the report down on the Minister's desk. He looked up at Barry. "He's very cunning, didn't

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leave a trace." He turned back to the Minister, but Abdul Ben Achmed was busy with a phone.

Barry listened to him speak rapidly in his native tongue. He was asking for an immediate checkup of Doctor Ahmes' movements from the airport. Moments later he replaced the phone.

"We will have to wait, gentlemen. I will have a complete record of this party's movements shortly."

DALTON gazed silently over at Barry. And Barry felt his spirits slipping. Something inside him told him that Anubis would have covered his trail completely.

It began again. The cigarettes and coffee. The minutes crept by. Barry's stomach rebelled against the aromatic liquid. The sweet cigarettes made his head swim. He noted that Dalton was beginning to show signs of tension. He was drumming the edge of his chair with nervous fingers.

The door opened suddenly and the same bespectacled clerk strode into the room. He handed Achmed another another clipped report, and again silently departed. Once more Barry leaned forward as the Minister read swiftly.

Moments later Achmed laid the report on his desk. His long slender fingers cupped under his chin. There was a frown on his face.

"I am sorry, gentlemen, I regret to say that I cannot aid you. My agents have checked this Ahmes and his party's movements as far as is possible. They gave their destination as Shepheard's Hotel. The management cannot verify their arrival. It is obvious that these people have deliberately covered their activities. I will have my agents alerted with a full description and account. Possibly in a day or so we will have definite news. These matters take time."

Barry felt his hopes twist in agony. In a day or so! He looked across at Dalton. The American Agent had risen. He was bowing politely and murmuring thanks. Dazedly Barry followed suit.

Outside, they hailed a passing cab. Barry spoke urgently as they started back to the hotel.

"We've just been wasting our time! Anubis is too clever to leave any traces—if I hadn't see him outside the hotel I'd almost believe he never came to Cairo!"

Dalton shrugged. "There isn't anything else we can do but wait. You must understand that I can only act in accord with the Egyptian government. Achmed's police will find his hiding place if it can be found. Even if it were possible to act on our own hook, what leads do we have? Don't forget that we have time on our side. Every hour will draw the net tighter around the city. Anubis and this woman you speak of can't possibly escape. Every route is covered."

Barry writhed. It was easy enough for Dalton to sit smugly back and wait. But was time on their side? Barry recalled once again Anubis' words that time was short. Short for whom? For what? Barry feared that at any moment Anubis might act. Heaven only knew how much of an organization he had built up already in Egypt, and unless he were stopped it would be only a stepping stone.

He glanced out the window as the cab slowed. They were approaching the hotel. A large black sedan was just pulling away from the curbing.

DALTON paid off the cab driver and together they strode into the lobby. Even as they entered, Barry grabbed Craig Dalton's arm.

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"Craig! That woman talking to the desk clerk—she's the matron assigned to Joan. What is she doing down here?"

"I don't know," Dalton replied slowly. "We can find out."

Barry led the way hurriedly over to the desk. The woman turned at that moment and saw Barry approaching. A startled expression came over her features.

"Mister Randall! I don't understand—I thought you were at the government building?"

Barry frowned. "How did you know that? And why aren't you upstairs with Miss Forrest? I gave definite instructions—"

"But, sir," the woman protested, "You just sent for Miss Forrest. A government man and his secretary just left with her—"

"What!" Barry paled.

Beside him, Craig Dalton stepped forward. "Did you say she just *left?"*

The woman nodded puzzledly. "Why yes, he gave his name as a Mister Anubis and—"

"Anubis!" Barry cried out, grabbing Dalton's arm desperately. "That car that just left! The one that pulled away when we drove up—Anubis and Zaleikka had Joan in it with them! Do you hear, man — they've kidnapped her!"

Seconds later a frantic Barry Randall rushed out onto the street. Dalton, breathing hard, followed close at his heels. Together they stared off in the direction the car had taken moments before.

"They're g o n e, C r a i g!" Barry groaned. "They must have turned off at the bend toward Esbekiyeh Gardens —we'll never be able to pick up their trail!"

Dalton took Barry's arm. Barry pulled away savagely. His eyes were flaming, his whole body trembling.

"Easy, Barry, it was a trap and we walked right into it. But Anubis won't get very far this time. I'll contact Achmed immediately. He'll have every block checked in five minutes!"

Dalton rushed away. Barry stood gazing helplessly down the street. His fists were clenched, he could feel his nails biting into his flesh. But the pain was nothing to the agony that gnawed within him.

"I'll find you Joan," he murmured over and over. "I'll find you! . . ."

CHAPTER IX

The Seven Lamps

A SMOKY haze thickened the air of Barry Randall's room. Cigarette butts littered the ash trays on the desk beside his bed. His feet beat a steady tattoo on the Arab rug as he paced slowly back and forth. His hair was disheveled, his clothes rumpled. He had been waiting for hours, his eyes straying hungrily to the telephone on the desk.

"You wait here at the hotel, Barry," Craig Dalton had said shortly after the kidnapping. "There's just a chance that Anubis might get in touch with us, especially if he's holding the girl for ransom. I'll be down at Achmed's office in case anything breaks. I expect fast action now."

That had been hours ago. Hours in which Barry's nerves had gradually worn thin. The suspense, the waiting, the not knowing where Joan had been taken to, the uncertainty of what Anubis planned to do next. Ransom. Barry laughed inwardly. Dalton was so sure that it was Anubis who was behind the girl's capture. Barry knew differently. It was Zaleikka! She hated the girl, in some strange way she had

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formed an infatuation for him, swift, born as the Eastern dawn and she knew that Joan Forrest stood in her way to holding him. Barry knew that Zaleikka wouldn't be content until the girl was put out of the way—destroyed. And to Zaleikka, it would be the logical thing to do. She was of an age when life was cheap, and that of a woman, the cheapest of all. He felt sure too, that Anubis was only playing her along until the Sphinx had been opened. But Zaleikka too had intimated plans of her own. Plans that concerned him.

The Sphinx. Barry's thoughts centered on the word. He stopped his pacing suddenly, stood riveted to the middle of the floor. Of course! Anubis had to reach the Sphinx—*he had to reach the Sphinx! But what if he were prevented?*

The telephone jangled on the desk.

Barry started nervously. He took a step forward and hesitated. What if it were Anubis? Or Zaleikka? Would he be able to trace the call through the switchboard of the hotel?

The telephone rung insistently.

Barry stepped slowly forward. His hand closed over the receiver. He lifted it.

"Yes?"

"It's me, Barry, Dalton."

"Oh," disappointment swept through him.

"I'm afraid I've got bad news, Barry," Dalton hesitated.

"You couldn't trace the car, is that it?"

"That's right. From the looks of things it vanished into thin air. Every patrol in the city was alerted but not a thing turned up. Achmed is pretty upset about it, this puts his government on the spot—having a foreign woman kidnapped right under his nose. We're going to comb the entire area of Esbekiyeh Gardens tonight. I have a hunch Anubis is in that neighborhood."

"And what do you expect me to do?" Barry demanded hoarsely. "Stay cooped up in this room while Joan is in that devil's hands?"

"Take it easy!" Dalton snapped. "Of course I don't expect you to sit and twiddle your thumbs. I'll pick you up a little later this evening, maybe sooner. Incidentally, you should have seen the expression on Abdul Ben Achmed's face when I mentioned the Sphinx story to him!"

The Sphinx! Barry gripped the phone tighter. "Listen, Craig, you tell Achmed to put a guard around the Sphinx—tell him to cover every inch of it! Whether you believe it or not, Anubis has to get to the Sphinx and he has to have Zaleikka with him! If we have a guard posted we can stop him, maybe even catch him!"

Dalton whistled. "Say, that's not a bad idea. I should have thought of that before. I'll do it."

"When will you come by and pick me up?" Barry's voice lifted with a tense eagerness.

"I told you I wasn't sure. Maybe in an hour or so. Sit tight until then."

BARRY replaced the phone. He sat down at the desk and picked up a pencil. He began tracing nervous doodads on the desk pad. At least he had seen to it that a guard would be posted at the Sphinx. A small wave of triumph filled him. It was the first check he had been able to produce against the Egyptian. But would that stop him? And what about Joan? Would Anubis let Zaleikka have her way with the girl? What would Zaleikka do? And did she really have any power over him? What had she meant when she told him he couldn't escape her?

Barry pondered these questions, trying desperately to solve them. Finally

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his thoughts centered on Zaleikka. He found it still hard to believe that she was a woman over three thousand years old. Her strange Oriental beauty clouded his mind, and her eyes — he could see them even now . . .

He was suddenly very tired. His limbs felt like leaden weights. His mind grew heavy with lethargy. He felt as if the strain of the past days had been too much for him. He wanted to sleep. The pencil scrawled limply in his hand. What was he thinking of? Oh yes, Zaleikka . . .

There was a buzzing in his head. A nest of bees maybe. No, that wasn't it. Silly. What was he thinking? Zaleikka . . .

Somebody was calling him. It came from far away.

"Barry—Barry—"

Why didn't they let him alone. He wanted to sleep. His head sank forward upon his chest. There it was again. But this time it was louder. Somebody calling—*"Barry—you must come to me. . . ."*

Visions whirled in his head. And out of them came two large myrtle orbs, closer, closer.

Suddenly Barry knew. Something deep inside his consciousness told him. For this had happened to him before. He struggled against it. He fought to rouse himself. He had been a fool to let his drowsiness weaken him! It was *her* again—*Zaleikka!*

The buzzing faded, kaleidoscopic colors smoothed out, the myrtle orbs grew smaller, smaller . . . He was looking into a room, a room of Oriental makeup. There were brilliant colored trappings hanging from the walls. There were brocaded silken pillows on the floor. And there was a low couch beside an incense brazier.

Zaleikka, clad in a filmy shimmering garment, lay dreamily on the couch, her head propped up against a sloping back.

And at her feet, bathing them with an amber colored fluid, was Joan Forrest!

Barry struggled furiously to break the mental bond. But it was useless. Zaleikka smiled at him, her red lips parting, beckoning. At her feet, Joan Forrest continued her labors, an abject slave, her eyes, her face, emotionless, dully obeying.

"You have come to Egypt, Barry. Now you will come to me." Her words rang in his brain. Her face grew closer. *"I am waiting. You must come now, alone. Tonight we commune with the Gods of Egypt—tonight will the power of the ancients rise again!"*

Barry revolted against the fanaticism in her eyes. He saw there all the pent-up passions, jealousies and power quests of a lost age. *"I am waiting, Barry. You will come to me now—in the Mûski at the house of the Seven Lamps. You will find it at 17 Sankara —remember, do not forget."*

Barry stirred dully. His voice sounded hoarsely: "I will remember—Seven Lamps—17 Sankara—" His fingers scrawled with the pencil on the desk pad.

"I will guide you—you must hurry . . ."

She came closer until her vision filled his entire sight. He rebelled. He fought desperately. He called upon every ounce of will power he possessed. Sweat stood out on his face. His eyes bulged, his temples throbbed—

IT WAS like awakening from a nightmare. Barry's mind suddenly cleared. He was sitting at his desk in the hotel. The pencil was still clutched in his fingers.

But the spell of Zaleikka had been broken.

Relief spread over Barry's features. But then he remembered Joan Forrest,

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helpless, a slave at the feet of Zaleikka. His eyes glanced at the desk pad. He saw the scrawled words: *House of Seven Lamps, 17 Sankara.* He remembered.

"The address! They're in the *Mûski* —the native quarter!"

He tried to remember everything Zaleikka had said. Tonight—commune with the Gods—Anubis was acting tonight!

Barry rose swiftly from the desk. He would have to get there before they left —he would have to stop them somehow. Dalton! Barry glanced swiftly at his watch. Dalton might come in any minute. But could he wait? No, there wasn't time. But Dalton must know . . .

Barry turned back to the desk. He pulled a sheet of paper from a drawer and hastily scrawled a message. He left it on the desk.

Then he was rushing from the room. The door slamming behind him.

BARRY paid off the cab driver and stood silently staring into the darkness around him. The *Mûski* was like a sealed grave, the cry of the vendor stilled, the call to prayer of the *muezzin* dormant until the morning sun from the East.

He stared curiously about him. The shops of Arab dealers were dark and silent. The street itself was narrow, the buildings leaning over like sleeping vultures. There were no street lights, nothing but gloom and shadow.

He had asked the driver for 17 Sankara. Was this the right place? There was nothing here but shops and—

He suddenly saw tiny globules of light a short distance away. He hurried along the street, his footsteps sounding eerily on the cobblestones.

The lights were coming from a dwarf-like *mosque* set back a half hundred yards from the street. Tall bushes and lebbekh trees girded it from the front. And Barry breathed harder.

The lights were seven tiny lamps hanging over an arched portal!

It was the House of the Seven Lamps —just as Zaleikka had foretold!

Barry strode forward cautiously. Would Anubis have the house guarded? A sudden fear possessed him. He was deep in the native quarter—far from the protection of *continental* Cairo—was this whole section an ambush? Was this the headquarters of Anubis' forces?

He made his way slowly through the shrubbery and lebbekh trees. He was almost to the portal with the glowing lamps when—

"Good evening, Mister Randall, I have been expecting you."

Barry wheeled sharply. Two figures had suddenly materialized from behind a large shrub. One of them was holding a gun, pointed steadily at him. Even in the gloom he recognized them. Anubis and Hassan!

"I would advise you to remain quite still, Mister Randall. A revolver makes quite a loud report at night, and I have no desire to kill you—yet."

Barry felt like a trapped child. "How did you know I was coming?" he demanded hoarsely.

"It was very simple. Zaleikka came to me like the child she is. She told me she had been *en rapport* with you and that you had broken her control. She feared you might be bringing the police. But my judgment of you was right—you would not wish to endanger the life of Miss Forrest by such rash action—would you?"

Barry sensed the smile that was on Anubis' face. "What do you expect to do?" he asked. He realized that he must stall for time as much as possible. "You realize of course that the Egyptian government is tracing you even

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now as a result of your kidnaping Miss Forrest!"

"After tonight the government will do as I command!" Anubis retorted, his voice rising. "But let us go inside. I am sure you are anxious to see your American woman."

HASSAN stepped forward. Barry caught a glimpse of his face in the light of the lamps. There was hatred there, a burning hatred that blazed from his eyes. Barry knew that Hassan would like nothing better than to pull the trigger.

The door opened as they mounted a trio of stone steps. A white robed servant bowed deeply as Anubis passed him. Barry followed, feeling the blunt snout of the gun at his back.

They walked along a long barren corridor flanked with curtained rooms. Soft amber lights were set in the high ceiling, and a fragrance of sandalwood incense thickened the air. Anubis suddenly stopped before a scarlet drape. He motioned Barry to enter as he swept the cloth aside.

Barry stopped short inside the room. He stared at brilliant trappings hanging from the walls, brocaded silken floor cushions—he had seen this room before!

The vision! It was exact in every detail—and there was the low couch and—

"So you have come, Barry."

Zaleikka reclined languorously on the couch. And at her feet, sitting abjectly and staring in a vacant devotion up at the Egyptian woman was Joan.

Barry rushed forward and knelt beside the girl, turned her gently toward him, looking into her eyes.

"Forget her! She is nothing but a slave girl!"

Barry heard Zaleikka speak in rapid angry tones. Gently he released Joan. Then he heard a laugh from behind them.

"You see now, Zaleikka, just how much this man cares for you. You will see now that I was right. He and the girl stand only as a threat to us!" Anubis stood inside the scarlet drapery. Hassan was beside him, alertly watching, the gun held in readiness.

Zaleikka glared across the room at Anubis. She straightened haughtily, her green eyes flashing. "No man can resist a Priestess of Karnak!" she replied sharply.

Anubis only smiled. "And yet this man broke your control over him."

Zaleikka turned her gaze on Barry. He felt her eyes burning into him. For a moment he feared she would listen to Anubis. Then, as suddenly as the fire had leapt in her, she quieted.

"You are the only man who has ever spurned me, Barry, and there have been many." Her voice flowed like rippling waters. "I find that I am glad. After tonight we will rise in the glory of Egypt together!"

Barry forced his eyes away from her, and rose.

"Do not let your spirits rise prematurely, Mister Randall," Anubis spoke in English, Barry noted, so Zaleikka couldn't understand him. "It is true that after tonight the glory of Egypt will rise again. But it will rise with me! You are well aware of my plans, and you must be equally aware by now that the only reason I keep you alive is to satisfy the whims of Zaleikka. Too, you and the girl will act as admirable hostages in the event of any interference by the police."

Barry laughed. "Suppose I tell Zaleikka what you are planning to do. Do you think she will lead you to the Sphinx?"

Anubis continued to smile. "You have my permission to tell her anything

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you wish. I am quite certain she will follow me. There are some things you do not know."

BARRY remained silent. He glanced at Zaleikka. She was watching them closely. Anubis spoke again, this time in Coptic:

"In a way I am sorry that you did not tell the police of my address. I would have been very happy to welcome them, now that we are about to move."

Barry glanced from Zaleikka back to Anubis. Both of them were smiling. "What do you mean?" Barry asked.

"Perhaps you noticed the seven lamps when you arrived?"

Barry nodded.

"What you did not notice was that they serve a dual purpose. Within the lamps are packets of high explosive. At a touch of a switch they will detonate. The switch is an electric eye that controls the entrance. When in operation, the slightest breaking of the beam will set off the explosive. You see that I am prepared for any eventuality."

Barry stood stunned. His face paled. Good Lord! If Dalton had received his message he would be on his way over even now with Achmed's agents! He would be walking straight into a trap! A trap that Barry knew he himself had baited.

"You seem pale, Mister Randall. Do my words frighten you? Have no fear, we will leave in time should the necessity arrive. Perhaps you *did* notify the police. Ah, I see the fear in your eyes. Or is it for yourself?

"In any event, we are ready to proceed. We will leave shortly for Ghizeh!"

Barry relaxed slightly. Anubis was planning to leave at once! He was so sure of himself, he thought he had every step in his plans covered. But Barry knew there would be a reception waiting for them at the Sphinx! The Egyptian police would be waiting.

There was a dull throbbing of sound from somewhere outside. Anubis turned suddenly. He listened. Then he left the room, calling a sharp command to Hassan. The Arab blocked the doorway, his gun held in readiness.

Barry glanced quickly at Zaleikka. She was staring at him with a strange expression. He looked down at Joan Forrest. The girl continued to gaze up at the Egyptian woman with a rapt attention.

The drapery swept aside and Anubis came hurriedly into the room. His eyes were cold, his face a pale mask.

"I see you did notify the police! They are pulling up outside now! But it is I who will surprise them! I have set the lamps—we leave at once. Quickly!"

He motioned to Hassan. The Arab stepped forward and shoved the gun in Barry's ribs. Barry moved forward. Behind him, Zaleikka rose swiftly from the couch. She swept from the room, Joan Forrest following mutely at her heels.

It was a whirl of motion. Barry was aware of rushing through the long corridor, he heard a door open ahead of them, and then he was out in the darkness of the night.

A black shape loomed ahead of them. Barry gathered his sense of direction. It was a large sedan! From somewhere out front he heard muffled pounding of footsteps approaching the house. That would be Dalton and the police! They were walking right into death!

Barry threw caution away. He twisted and shouted at the top of his lungs:

"Dalton! For God's sake keep away —it's a trap!"

Then something hit the back of his

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head. He groaned and fell forward. He felt himself being picked up roughly. He was dumped into the rear of the car. The motor roared. Desperately he tried to maintain his consciousness. He had to warn Dalton. He struggled painfully erect. Hassan was sitting close beside him. He felt the Arab's rough hand over his mouth. He was aware of the car spurting suddenly ahead. He heard muffled shouts behind them.

And then a deafening explosion . . .

CHAPTER X

The Desert Temple

BARRY was unaware how much time had passed when his senses cleared. He became instantly aware of the jouncing of the car beneath him. It brought a sharp pain to the back of his head. A groan slipped from his lips as he felt gingerly at the lump.

Cool soft fingers brushed his aside and gently caressed his head.

"You feel better now, Barry."

Barry straightened himself in the darkness of the car. Zaleikka was sitting close against him in the back seat. Her face was close to his, her fingers soft against his hair.

Across from her, Barry saw the limp figure of Joan Forrest slumped against the back cushions. Ahead, in the front seat, Hassan was deftly toying the wheel of the car and Anubis, sitting beside him was holding a gun.

"You should not have tried to warn —your friends," Zaleikka spoke soothingly in his ear.

Barry shot upright. His friends! The explosion! He shoved the Egyptian woman away roughly and half began a dive for the front seat.

"You will sit quite still, Mr. Randall. This weapon I am holding discharges easily. I would gladly kill you."

Barry relaxed. He couldn't see Anubis' face in the darkness, but he could imagine the cold steady stare, the hate in his eyes. He did see the gun pointed unerringly at him.

He glanced out the window of the car. His breath catching in his throat. They were out of the city! The desert stretched long and dismally around them, and overhead, the moon cast a silver light on the sands below.

He knew they were heading west. Ahead lay the plateau of Gizeh, a short eight miles from Cairo. How far had they come? Had Dalton been killed back in the *Mûski?* His heart chilled for he knew that it had been his message that had brought Dalton and the police to a certain death.

Ahead lay death too. Once Zaleikka opened the Sphinx and Anubis got his hands on the secrets of the ancient Pharoahs, the whole peace of the world would be at stake. A new Hitler would arise from the sands of Egypt. With him would come a fanatical following empowered with weapons of devastating might.

Barry breathed deeply. But there was still a chance. If Achmed had acted there would be a cordon of police around the Sphinx that not even Anubis would dare to challenge! And if the surprise was complete there would be a chance to capture him before he knew of the trap.

BESIDE him, Barry heard a stifled gasp from Zaleikka. He turned his head. She was staring in fixed rapture through the windshield of the car. Barry followed her gaze.

The long plateau of Ghizeh was a scant mile away. And looming in the moonlight, its immobile features watching silently over the Valley of the Nile beyond it, was the Sphinx!

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Close by it was the Great Pyramid, dwarfing the Sphinx in size, but for Barry, the Pyramid held no interest. He could only stare at the Sphinx, at its shadow reaching eagerly over the sands like the palm of a colossal evil hand.

He looked back at Zaleikka. Her eyes were wide, staring. Her lips were moving in unintelligible words. He could see the emotion that stirred her. He suddenly wondered what she was thinking. Her eyes had last seen the Sphinx thousands of years back. Did she remember?

"Father—Oh Father Of Light—I have returned—"

He heard the words in an ancient chant of Coptic from her lips. And a tense expectancy grew within him. They had only a half mile to go along the desert highway. A half mile and into the arms of Achmed's men.

Anubis gave a sudden sharp command to Hassan. The Arab slowed the car and peered intently through the windshield. The car's headlights were not lit, only the moonlight showed the road.

Barry frowned. Why were they suddenly slowing down? Had Anubis seen the police cordon around the Sphinx? No, that was impossible, he himself saw nothing at the distance. Besides, Achmed's men would have more sense than to show themselves. What else then? Had Anubis changed his mind?

Even as Barry wondered, Hassan suddenly swerved the car from the highway onto an ancient hard packed camel trail. The car jounced over ruts.

Barry's perplexity grew. Even as they left the road, he glanced out the window back toward Cairo. He could see the faint glimmer of the city miles back, and—

There were two tiny points of light far back on the highway!

A sharp exclamation from the front of the car brought Barry's head around. Anubis had seen the lights!

He spoke swiftly to Hassan in crisp Arabic: "Speed, man! There is little time!"

Hassan grunted and Barry felt the car leap.

"Barry . . ."

On the far side of the rear seat, Joan Forrest was stirring. Her head was turned toward him, and her eyes, caught in a silver lancelet of moonlight were staring at him an appeal, a prayer of help pouring out to him. She was conscious!

"Joan!" Barry called hoarsely.

Even as the word left his lips, Zaleikka stiffened. She turned swiftly toward the girl.

Barry swore deeply. His hand shot out and clutched Zaleikka's chin. He twisted her forcibly away from Joan. His other hand reached for her throat.

He stopped his movement in mid-air. Joan had slumped against the back of the seat. Her eyes were vacant again.

And then he was aware of Zaleikka. He still had her chin clutched firmly in his hand. Her eyes were glaring at him in a passionate rage. He let go of her, breathing through clenched teeth.

SHE didn't say a word. She continued to look at him. And Barry saw the mocking triumph in her eyes. She was taunting him in mute words to go ahead. He knew that he couldn't, not as long as Joan remained under her command. And Anubis would have intervened long before that.

His heart a sickening lump, Barry turned his eyes wearily ahead. Off to the left of the car was the plateau at Gizeh, a scant half mile distant. Would the guards hear the sound of the car and investigate? Barry felt that they wouldn't. To them it might be a ruse

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to draw their attention from the Sphinx. What about the lights on the highway? He glanced swiftly out the back window, his lips brushing lightly against Zaleikka's hair.

He drew back involuntarily and faced the front again. He knew the movement had not escaped Zaleikka. But he didn't care. He had seen enough. The lights were closer. Was it merely a tourist party? But what would tourists be doing on the desert at this time of night?

Further thoughts abruptly left him. He heard Anubis talking rapidly to Hassan and pointing.

Barry followed his gaze. Ahead, rising forlorn amid the desert sands, like a dead thing vomited from its grave, stood the remains of a small temple. Barry remembered having seen it a number of years before, but little attention had ever been paid it. It stood amid a group of common graves, probably of the lower caste members of ancient Egyptian society. The temple seemed to be merely a site for the cemetery. It had never been given a formal name as there were many like it along the Nile.

It was in a pitiable state. Its roof had long since given way to the pressing weight of centuries. Its walls were cracked with great chinks of granite and limestone missing. Pieces of its stone littered the abandoned camel trail, and the car bumped dangerously.

Hassan suddenly stopped the car. The temple stood a short distance away. And off to the left, Barry judged the distance to be a good half mile, stood the Sphinx and its mightier companion the Great Pyramid.

Anubis had already left the car. Barry was suddenly aware that he had opened the door on his side of the car and was motioning him outside.

"If you please, Mister Randall, we have reached our destination."

Barry got out of the car, testing his muscles. The pain throbbed madly for a moment in the back of his head, and then subsided to a dull ache. Outside of that he felt fit. If he could manage to get inside Anubis' gun hand . . .

Anubis stepped back as Zaleikka stepped on the sands, Joan Forrest followed mutely beside her.

Barry turned to Anubis. "What do you mean—destination? I thought the Sphinx was the goal—"

"And so it is," Anubis replied smoothly, motioning Barry forward with the gun. "But a straight line is not always the shortest distance between two points. Especially when there is a possibility of interference from, shall we say—other parties?"

BARRY caught the subtle sarcasm. He stared at Anubis in astonishment.

"You mean that there is another entrance to the Sphinx—here?"

Anubis kept Barry walking beside him. Ahead of them Hassan was guiding Zaleikka and Joan Forrest over a mass of crumbled rock.

"I mean there is an entrance, *one* entrance, and yes, it is here."

"But this is preposterous!" Barry exclaimed. "The Sphinx is a good half mile from here!"

"My dear Mister Randall, you disappoint me. As an archaeologist you must surely have heard of tunnels."

"Tunnels?"

"I believe I used the word. Zaleikka informed me of the temple guarding the entrance to the Sphinx, and naturally, it had to be this one—so insignificant in appearance, so neglected by the savants of our present age!"

Anubis' spirits were running high. Barry could tell by the easy way he bantered words. And he had reason

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to be. Barry was still stunned. Good heavens! A tunnel! That was the last thing he would have thought of! *And the Egyptian police were a half mile away guarding the Sphinx—totally unaware of them!*

Inside the ruins of the temple, moonlight splashed around, revealing cracked marble pillars which at one time had supported the fallen roof. The floor was deep with piled debris, and the silence screamed out at them as they stood staring about.

Barry kept one eye on Anubis, hoping for a chance. But it was apparent that Anubis was taking no chances. He faced Barry continuously.

Zaleikka stepped forward alone. She had moved slowly, almost soundlessly, and Barry thought that she might have been floating instead of walking. She moved into what had apparently been the center of the temple and stood there with the moonlight washing over her. Barry felt a coldness run up and down his spine as he looked at her. She was suddenly something that didn't exist—something that couldn't exist, a phantasm, a desert mirage that had slipped up out of the Valley of the Dead.

He shook his head. She *was* real. He knew that. He knew it more than any man in the world. And he realized that soon he wouldn't be the only one.

She moved again. Barry followed her with his eyes. Beside him he could hear Anubis breathing rapidly.

Zaleikka walked up to what remained of an altar. It was a huge block of carved granite, nearly six feet long and fully five feet high. Above it a small remnant of the roof remained. As far as Barry could see, it was the only place in the Temple where debris had not piled up. Standing before the altar, Zaleikka looked like an ancient Goddess or,—Barry found the right word, *Priestess*—about to begin a ritual as old as time itself.

She suddenly stooped and ran her fingers lightly over the carven figures on the front of the altar. Then she straightened, turning.

Even at the short distance away, Barry saw the flash of triumph in her eyes. Her voice rang out breaking the silence: "It is here! The ages have not concealed it—I am ready!"

Anubis let out a short sound. It was unintelligible. A wave of fanaticism swept across his pale features and his eyes burned like dark coals.

"You see! You see!"

Barry knew the words were directed at him. The final proof. The utter irony. Though the temple had succumbed to the ravages of time, the altar remained intact.

BARRY felt a sharp prodding in his back. Anubis urged him forward. Hassan had Joan Forrest roughly by the arm. He was half dragging her to the altar. Barry watched angrily, but helplessly.

They stood before it. Zaleikka stared once for a long moment at Anubis. Something passed between them. Whatever it was, Barry couldn't catch it. Then Zaleikka, her eyes catching his for the barest part of a second, turned and stooped before the altar.

Her fingers found a certain carving. Her hand seemed to carress it. There was a faint click.

She rose expectantly.

Nothing happened.

A fleeting frown crossed her face. She ran her fingers again over the stone figure. Again came a click.

Nothing happened.

Silence fell. And then suddenly Barry stiffened. Another sound suddenly grew in his ears. A purring sound—like a motor!

Hassan sprang into life. He jumped

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back over the tumbled stone and rotted wood and disappeared. Seconds later he was racing back.

"Effendi! The police—a car approaches!"

Barry caught the rapid Arabic and his heart sang. The police! Dalton hadn't been killed after all! He had followed them—those lights far back on the highway . . .

"Quick—Zaleikka!" Anubis spoke nervously. "Open it!"

Zaleikka tried again. Still nothing happened. She straightened.

"Something has gone wrong with the weights beneath the altar. They release but do not move it!"

Anubis turned savagely to Barry. "You! Push on it—push!"

Barry stepped forward. There had been murder in Anubis' face. He didn't dare refuse. He put his shoulder to the huge stone and pushed with all his might. It refused to budge.

Anubis spoke rapidly in Arabic. Then Hassan was beside Barry, his massive shoulders bulging.

Sweat stood out on Barry's face. His hopes rose. The stone was stuck—the police were coming . . .

There was a grating sound. Barry felt himself moving forward.

Suddenly, as if a spring had been loosened, the altar swung wide.

He stared down at a black well of steps.

CHAPTER XI

Into The Sphinx

FROM outside the Temple came a screeching of brakes. Then the clatter of feet rushing over sand and stone.

Barry was about to yell when he saw Anubis swerve the gun upon him.

"Down those steps! Quick!"

He had no choice. Hassan shoved him forward roughly. Zaleikka had already disappeared into the depths with Joan following behind her.

"Barry! Barry!"

Barry heard a voice call out. It was Dalton!

He twisted sharply on the steps. Hassan was following closely behind him. Through his legs he saw men rushing into the temple. It was Anubis who had fired. He stood at the edge of the open altar, carefully aiming his gun.

"Look out men—take cover!" Barry heard Dalton command.

It all happened fast, in the flashing instant he looked through the Arab's legs and before his own head disappeared beneath the stone opening. He saw Dalton rushing across the temple, aiming his gun. He heard Anubis fire again.

He saw Dalton pitch forward on his face.

Then blackness enveloped him.

He fumbled downward in the darkness. Behind him he felt Hassan close at his heels. Then he heard another clatter of footsteps. Anubis was following.

The darkness was stygian. Barry hesitated. Hassan bumped into him, swore deeply and shoved.

Barry lost his balance. He pitched forward down the steps. He flung his arms over his head to protect himself.

It seemed like it lasted forever. Then suddenly he stopped falling. He lay panting, gathering his senses.

The darkness closed in around him like a sodden blanket. He could hear Hassan and Anubis coming down the steps. A wild idea struck him—if he remained where he was they would fall over him! In the darkness he could take them by surprise.

Sudden light sprang up around him.

It happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that he scrambled to his feet.

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Hassan reached the bottom of the steps at the same moment. He didn't stop. He shoved Barry roughly. Behind him, his face an evil mask, Anubis followed, the gun clutched desperately in his hand.

"You dirty devil!" Barry shouted at him. "You killed Dalton!"

Anubis didn't answer. He motioned to Hassan. The Arab caught Barry's arm and in a swift movement had a hammer-lock on him. Pain throbbed up his back. Hassan shoved him forward.

Behind them came a shouting of voices. The police had found the opening!

For the first time Barry became aware of his surroundings. Ahead of them, standing close together, were Zaleikka and Joan. Zaleikka was adjusting something on the side of the corridor. It was a small globular projection with a dim radiation swelling from it. All along the corridor, at intervals, similar projections were set in the stone walls. Each of them was emitting an amber light!

The corridor itself was made up of solid blocks of stone. It was five feet wide and over six feet in height, as nearly as he could determine.

Then they had reached Zaleikka.

"The police are following us!" Anubis spoke in rapid Coptic to the Egyptian woman. She nodded, a faint smile crossing her features.

"Follow me, quickly!" she answered.

SHE turned and began to run down the corridor. It seemed endless as far as Barry could see. Hassan was close beside him, holding his arm in the painful grip. He could hear Anubis' feet pounding close behind them.

A shout rang out.

They kept on running.

There was a deafening blast in the tunnel. Something whizzed by Barry's head.

Ahead, Zaleikka suddenly stopped. Joan was beside her. Anubis came up breathlessly as another blast echoed.

Stone chipped over his head and he heard a bullet ricochet past him.

Barry knew that sooner or later one of the bullets would find him or the girl. Acting instinctively he dove forward, carrying her to the stone floor.

He was in time to see a group of men hurrying toward them from the altar steps. They were flourishing guns and shouting.

Then Anubis was firing. Before Barry had time to think, to stop him, reverberating blasts echoed from his gun. A man screamed far down the corridor. He fell, tripping another. Others came on.

Zaleikka's voice suddenly split through the noise.

"Fools! Do you think you can stop me now?"

Barry glanced hurriedly up at her as bullets whined around them.

She was gripping a metal ring in the wall. Savagely she twisted it.

Amidst the gun blasts there came another sound. It started deep and rose in a rumbling roar. And with it Barry saw a section of the ceiling falling downward!

Horror swept over Barry's face. Were they to be trapped in a cave in? Was this the fate Zaleikka had chosen for—

He waited for the crash of the stone. There was none. It slowed its mad plunge and touched the floor with a faint thump. Then it dawned on Barry that it was a stone door—the corridor was sealed off!

Zaleikka was laughing.

Barry crawled slowly to his feet, lifting the girl gently. He felt suddenly foolish. He had thrown himself to the

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floor to protect himself and Joan from danger, and Zaleikka had stood in cool defiance. He read as much in her eyes as she stared at him.

Then Anubis had turned. For once his face was drawn in a sickly pallor. A nerve twitched over his left eye. He nodded gratefully to Zaleikka.

"The fools! They will learn soon whom they oppose!"

Zaleikka stared at him for a long moment. "Yes—they will . . ."

From behind the stone block sealing the passage, Barry heard a muffled pounding. The blows of the men on the other side were futile. lifeless, as Barry's hopes suddenly became. At every turn Anubis had met them, and countered their every move. And now, within the last moment of triumph, Zaleikka had turned the tables. There was nothing to stop Anubis now. Nothing—except, maybe . . .

"We are safe now. They cannot get beyond the stone block." Zaleikka spoke confidently. "We may proceed with ease."

SHE turned to lead the way, and stopped. She was staring past Barry. He turned.

Hassan stood against the wall of the far side of the corridor. He was holding his right arm across his body. A thin stream of blood was running down his arm.

Anubis exclaimed: "Hassan—why did you not tell us!"

The Arab glared malevolently at Barry. "It is nothing, *Effendi.* But for the Randall dog it would have been he. When he pulled the white girl to the ground I was beside him. The bullet should have found him!"

Anubis muttered angrily. He pulled a handkerchief from his coat pocket and held it out to Barry.

"Bind his wound."

Barry took the handkerchief. He walked over to Hassan. The Arab sneered.

Barry bound the wound. Behind him, Barry heard Anubis talking rapidly to Zaleikka.

"These lights—where did they come from?"

"It is but one of the secrets of ancient Egypt. They are sun lamps using the power of Ammon Ra. They are indestructible and have lasted through the ages, as has the spirit of Egypt."

Hassan grunted as Barry tightened the knot of the handkerchief. A spasm of pain shot across his face, and with it a look of hate.

Barry ignored him, thinking hard at that moment that if these strange lights were a product of the ancient science of Egypt and had lasted through the centuries, then heaven only knew what awful powers there remained to be revealed yet. And he knew, that unless a miracle intervened, Anubis would have that power. With Zaleikka holding Jona in a hypnotic trance that modern medical science had failed to break, he also knew he was helpless against her. What could he do?

"You will begin to see now, Mister Randall, what the might of Egypt really is!"

Barry was suddenly aware that Anubis was talking to him. He looked at the Egyptian. Glowing triumph shone on his face. Anubis turned and bowed slightly to Zaleikka. "We will proceed."

Zaleikka let the trace of a smile cross her face. Her lips were parted and Barry could see sparkling white teeth.

ZALEIKKA led the way. They went slowly now, fear of the police gone. Barry could not help but think of poor Dalton, shot down in cold blood back in the temple. He vowed that Anubis

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would pay for that.

They walked on. Barry was aware of Hassan following closely behind him. The Arab would be only too glad if he tried anything. Barry didn't. Ahead, Anubis was walking beside Zaleikka, and they were conversing in low tones.

For the first time Barry noted the air in the tunnel. It grew stale and musty as they progressed. The tunnel seemed to be slanting downward with a gentle slope. It ran straight in the murky light of the wall lamps as far as he could see.

Minutes passed.

The tunnel began to curve. It wound around an S curve, and Barry became aware of other, smaller tunnels, branching off to the right and left. Similar lamps illuminated them, but they were few in comparison to the main corridor.

The slope was pronounced now. Barry wondered just where they were going. To the Sphinx, of course, he knew. But why continuously down?

The further they went, the more of a labyrinth it became. Only the fact that the main corridor was larger than the branching off tunnels gave Barry a sense of direction.

Suddenly ahead a bright light shone. It was an identical lamp set in an identical manner in the stone wall of the tunnel, but the light it gave off both dazzled and blinded. It was a miniature sun in the bowels of the earth.

Zaleikka stopped before it. She turned and faced them for a single moment. It was a tense silence that greeted her.

"We are now below the Sphinx," she announced. "The desert lies heavily over our heads. The secret which Khafre and his Priests planned and safeguarded, is here."

Barry glanced quickly at Anubis. He stood close beside Zaleikka, the nerve twitching over his eyes.

"But those other tunnels, Zaleikka—where do they lead?" Anubis asked her.

She smiled faintly. "They also were the plan of Khafre. They lead to—nowhere . . ."

Barry tried to understand that brief reply. But his attention was centered on Zaleikka. She had turned, facing the wall.

Her fingers rose to the dazzling light. Her hands were lost in the glare. She remained motionless for long seconds. Then suddenly she dropped her hands and stepped back.

There was a rising buzz of sound.

The dazzling light suddenly vanished.

They were staring at the blank stone wall.

And the wall began to move!

BARRY watched spellbound as a six foot section of the seemingly solid stone slid downward. In seconds time it had dropped even with the floor of the tunnel.

Barry sucked in his breath sharply. He was staring into an immense chamber!

Silently they entered. Only the sound of feet on the stone floor broke the stillness.

It was huge. Its size reminded Barry of a cathedral. The ceiling rose nearly sixty feet overhead, curving in a dome of solid stone. Set in the ceiling were numerous tiny lamps spraying the chamber with an amber floor of light. Its breadth staggered him. The great hall of Field's Museum was a cubby-hole in comparison. But the object in the center of the chamber put everything else in the background of his mind.

A throne of colossal proportions rose to the center of the domed ceiling. *And*

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but for the base it was a smaller, exac duplication of the Sphinx!

Zaleikka glided forward. She alone moved. They watched her advance upon the immense figure. At its base she turned toward them. Her face seemed to halo itself in the amber light.

Close to Barry, Anubis came to life. He broke his gaze away from Zaleikka and stared swiftly around the room. Barry followed his gaze, and instantly knew what Anubis was looking for.

Where was the science and weapons? But for the immense stone figure, the chamber was empty!

Across from them, Zaleikka suddenly laughed. Anubis strode toward her. Barry followed.

"But where—" Anubis began.

"Khafre himself hides the secret," Zaleikka replied, pointing up toward the statue. The features of King Khafre stared sightlessly down at them, carved into lifeless stone.

Anubis was frowning as Zaleikka continued:

"Such was the wisdom of Khafre and his Priests. For the final safeguard is here. For this purpose was I chosen and trained. Only I can open the vault."

It dawned on Barry. And from the look on Anubis' face, it was plain that he saw too. This mammoth figure, deep within the bowels of the Sphinx was the vault itself!

ZALEIKKA turned and faced a set of sloping steps leading up the front of the statue. She took one step, hesitated, and a short cry burst from her lips.

She turned toward them. Barry saw a look of fear cross her face. And the smooth white skin turned a dark gray pallor.

Anubis exclaimed hoarsely. He ran to her, held her upright with one arm, and slipped a tiny silver flask from his coat pocket. He raised it to her lips nervously.

"Drink! Quickly!" he commanded her.

Barry watched spellbound. What had happened? Zaleikka gulped hungrily at the flask. Anubis held it at her mouth for a long moment, then pulled away.

The Egyptian woman staggered. Her hand brushed wearily across her brow. Close beside Barry, Joan Forrest sighed strangely. Barry glanced quickly at her. An expression of agony crossed her beautiful features, and then, just as suddenly was gone.

When he looked back at Zaleikka she was normal again. The pallor had left her face. She was looking at Anubis gratefully.

"I, I felt weak . . ."

Anubis slipped the flask back in his coat pocket. "You will be all right now," he told her.

She nodded, looking at him strangely. Then she turned and mounted the steps of the statue.

Moments later she was far over their heads. A massive chair had been fashioned from the stone. She reclined herself upon it.

Barry didn't see her move. She didn't press any button, move any stones. Her eyes were closed. Almost it seemed as if she had become a part of the stone.

And the statue moved.

Barry stepped back unconsciously. It happened so fast that he wasn't prepared. The entire front of the stone figure split outward, like a set of swinging doors on silent hinges!

And Barry stared into the vault.

It was a large square room with knee high stone slabs set a few feet apart in orderly fashion. They reminded Barry of picnic tables spread out row upon row. Upon the slabs rested gleaming

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objects that defied description.

Anubis dove into the room. He ran from one slab to another, touching each object, and Barry could only stand rooted to the entrance.

Zaleikka swept by him, and out of the corner of his eye he saw Hassan standing behind him with Joan Forrest.

Anubis turned eagerly to Zaleikka.

"What are they? These—what can they do?" He pointed to a nearby slab. Row upon row of tiny metal objects lay upon it. As near as Barry could determine, they resembled a small charm box with an opaque lens in the middle and a tiny gold lever on the top. The front of it was covered with hieroglyphic symbols.

Zaleikka picked one of them up. She pointed it at Barry, her eyes fastened intently upon him.

"Were I to move this lever a certain degree, whoever or whatever stood before this lens, would cease to exist. It is the power of the sun, dissolving in an atomic stream once it is released."

She replaced the weapon on the slab. Barry shuddered. An atomic disintegrator! What chance would modern men—a modern army have against such a weapon? A few men equipped with such a devilish machine could destroy thousands!

Anubis laughed. "I see you are startled Mister Randall. And well you may be! With science like this in my hands I can mold the destiny of the world!"

Barry was too sick to notice. He dimly heard Zaleikka explaining the usage of other of the objects throughout the room. He heard her tell him of anti-gravity devices, of weapons that could create a field of force that no missile could penetrate it, and others.

He did not want to listen. His world was crashing down around him. Against these secrets of a lost age, modern science would be helpless. Anubis had reached his goal.

And then Barry suddenly stiffened. There was a sound.

From behind them, echoing down the length of the corridor leading to the desert temple, came a dull muffled explosion . . .

CHAPTER XII

Time Catches Up

ANUBIS spun around as if he had been struck. He glanced wildly at the tunnel entrance. Then he turned swiftly to Zaleikka.

"It is the police—they must have blasted the barrier!"

Barry's elation fled when Anubis sneered at him. "You think your friends will aid you? You fool! They are coming straight to their death! They shall be the first to feel the might of Egypt!"

"You mean the power mad mania of Anubis—don't you?" Barry replied hoarsely.

Anubis stared at him with glittering eyes. He spoke suddenly in English.

"Mister Randall, this is the crossroads. I have put up with you only because I had to pacify Zaleikka. I no longer have to do this. She has served her usefulness to me. You will watch." He paused, drew the tiny flask from his pocket and spilled the contents on the floor. Barry saw Zaleikka watching and listening with a strange frown. Anubis went on. "It will take you friends some time to reach this point in the tunnel. Before they do so I shall go out to meet them. I will not go empty handed. And, when I return, I will settle my account with you."

Barry knew what Anubis was going to do. He watched him pick up one

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of the strange metal boxes with the slender lever and lens opening. Then he handed his revolver to Hassan.

"You will see that they stay here until I return," he told him. "Let nobody, even Zaleikka, touch anything. Do you understand?"

Hassan's black eyes glinted with pleasure. He bowed slightly. *"Sclaam, Effendi.* I will see to it."

Barry tensed himself. Did he dare make a break for the tunnel? He saw Hassan watching him closely, his fingers tight around the gun. He knew it was useless, he would be dead before he got three feet away.

Anubis had turned to Zaleikka. "You say depressing this lever is what operates the weapon?" he asked impatiently.

Zaleikka stared coldly at him. "What do you plan to do? Why did you speak in another tongue?"

Anubis stormed at her. "You will answer my question! It is I who will decide what is to be done!"

Fury burned in Zaleikka's eyes. Her lips clenched. But she suddenly calmed.

"Yes—it is as you wish. You depress—the lever."

Anubis whirled and sped to the tunnel entrance.

BARRY watched him go with the feeling that he was sinking slowly in quick lime. He saw Anubis disappear into the tunnel and seconds later heard Zaleikka laugh. It was a tinkling laughter, like the sound of rain drops on a metal plate.

"What's so damned funny?" Barry glared at her.

The smile left her face. She stared at him, her eyes wide, myrtle pools.

"The time has come for you to make a decision, Barry."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you must choose quickly. If you join me, together we will rule the world! I will kill Anubis—for you."

She meant it. "And what about Joan?" Barry asked.

Anger flooded her face. "You will choose between us! She can give you nothing! I offer you power—and love!"

Love. Barry felt like laughing. Only it wasn't anything to laugh about. Across from them, Barry saw Hassan watching them closely, his gun ready. Behind the Arab, Joan Forrest stood mutely, her sweet face a vacant mask, her eyes staring only at Zaleikka.

And Barry thought he saw the way!

He laughed suddenly. "I wouldn't choose you if you were the last woman on Earth!" Then he slipped into English. "I'm going to kill you if it's the last thing I do!"

He advanced on Zaleikka.

"Stand still, white pig!"

Out of the corner of his eye Barry saw Hassan aiming at him. Barry steeled himself and continued to advance. Zaleikka began to back toward Hassan.

"Stop!" Hassan hissed the words out.

Barry kept coming forward. It was a long chance, he knew. He was counting on Hassan not shooting. Anubis had told him only to watch them.

Barry was almost upon Zaleikka. He lifted his hands as if he were about to grab her throat. And it happened.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Hassan come up behind him, his arm raised, the gun about to descend.

BARRY acted. He twisted savagely and dove to the floor. Hassan flew over him, tripping. A cry burst from his lips. His body slammed into Zaleikka's, knocking her hard against the floor. She lay still.

Barry scrambled to his feet. The

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Arab was twisting around, bringing his gun into play. Barry dove on him, his hand catching the barrel of the gun.

Hassan's breath was hot on Barry's face. The Arab kicked up at him. Barry turned his body sideways and slammed his free fist into the Arab's stomach. A whoosh of air spilled from Hassan's mouth. He threshed savagely and twisted his gun hand down. Barry stared into the muzzle.

He was looking at death. Hassan's finger was tightening on the trigger. With every ounce of strength in his body he wrenched the Arab's wrist. The gun deflected. There was a blast from it. Barry felt his left arm go numb.

Dizziness swept over him. Beneath him the Arab was hissing desperately. He was trying to bring the gun up again. Barry felt his fingers slipping from Hassan's wrist.

The Arab twisted his body suddenly. Barry rolled over and pain lanced up his left side. Hassan grinned triumphantly at him and slowly began to force the gun down.

Barry knew his strength was going. He wouldn't last another minute. But he gave a last desperate twist of his body and wrenched Hassan's gun hand inward.

There was a muffled blast from the weapon. Hassan collapsed on top of him, a rattling sob in his throat.

Slowly Barry crawled to his feet. He stood swaying, dark spots dancing before his eyes. He glanced down at his left arm. Blood was slowly dripping from his hand.

He heard a groan. Zaleikka was stirring on the floor. She had been dazed by the fall. And then Barry heard something else.

It was a shrill twinkling whine from the tunnel. It was followed by distant screams and then a short blast.

Anubis! Anubis was using the disintegrator ray on Dalton's men!

Barry scooped up the gun from the floor beside Hassan's body. Then he was running for the tunnel.

THE odor of burned flesh reached his nostrils as he raced breathlessly through the narrow corridor. His left arm hung limply at his side, and the pain of the bullet wound bit into him.

He rounded the last part of the S curve.

He stopped in his tracks. A man was running wildly toward him, sobs of rage welling in his throat. Beyond him Barry saw a mass of charred figures and another moving slowly on the stone floor.

The man rushing toward him suddenly stopped. A wild cry burst from his lips. Barry stared at him, horror in his eyes.

It was Anubis—his face, clothes and hands burned and smoking!

"She tricked me! It exploded!" he screamed.

Barry came toward him. He raised the gun in his right hand. Anubis stared wildly at it, let out a cry of fear and darted into one of the branching tunnels.

Barry urged his body forward. His senses were swimming, but one thought pounded through him. He had to get Anubis! The smell of the charred bodies in the main tunnel was sickening. Anubis had done that!

He sped into the side tunnel. Light was very dim. The wall lamps were spaced far apart and shadows thickened around him.

He heard Anubis running somewhere ahead. As he passed one of the lamps, he saw him. He aimed the gun, but it was too late. Anubis was gone again.

Barry suddenly stopped. Anubis' footsteps had ceased.

He moved cautiously forward.

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A hissing sound grew from somewhere ahead. Anubis!

And then Barry saw him. He was standing on the edge of thick shadows. There was terror on his face and his body was trembling. Barry raised the gun.

It clicked. It clicked again. Empty.

Savagely, Barry tossed it away. He went forward, the distance closing between him and the Egyptian. The hissing grew louder.

And suddenly Barry knew it was coming from behind Anubis!

Barry moved cautiously. Revulsion swept through him as he saw Anubis' face—horribly burned, his eyes two black scars smoldering in the charred flesh. Anubis let out a wild cry and flung himself forward, trying to dash around the side.

BARRY lashed out with his right hand. His knuckles crunched against Anubis' jaw. The Egyptian staggered back. Barry followed him up, his breath burning in his throat. He lashed out again. His fist caught the Egyptian square in the face. He fell back into the shadows.

Barry was about to follow him when he heard a wild scream. Then he heard a sickening thump, momentary silence, and then a loud angry hissing.

He edged forward cautiously, and then jumped swiftly back.

He was standing on the edge of a pit! And the hissing spat up at him out of the darkness. Nausea swept over him in a wave.

The pit was alive with writhing snakes!

He staggered against the side of the tunnel and was very sick. He remembered Anubis asking Zaleikka where the side tunnels led to. He remembered she had said to—nowhere . . . He could hear the deadly asps slithering in the blackness. He was sick again.

"Barry . . . Barry . . ."

A voice called out in the distance.

Barry turned. He heard his name repeated again. He began running back up the tunnel. That voice—it couldn't be! Yes—it was!

"Craig!" Barry yelled hoarsely. "Craig!"

He saw him limping from the entrance to the main tunnel. Then he reached him.

They stood staring at each other for a long moment. Dalton's face was haggard and worn, his clothes were torn and disheveled. And there was blood caked on the front of his shirt.

"Craig! I thought you were dead! My God man!"

"Anubis—B a r r y , w h e r e ' s that devil?"

Barry set his jaw grimly. "He's dead. Back there. I knocked him into a pit of snakes . . ."

Dalton listened to the choppy words. His face blanched "Good Lord!" he breathed. Then he stared at Barry's arm. "Man! You've been hurt!"

"Just a scratch," Barry lied. He looked down the tunnel toward the charred mounds. "All of them?" he asked hoarsely.

Dalton nodded. "I escaped. I couldn't keep up with them. Lost a little blood from the bullet crease. God, it was horrible—they dissolved into smoking hulks before my eyes! . . . Barry—what happened to that Egyptian woman?"

Barry started. Zaleikka! He had nearly forgotten about her!

"Come on, Craig, we've got to get back there—she's got Joan alone with her!"

DALTON labored alongside him. He was panting and flecks of foam stood on his lips. Barry spurted out

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in gasping words what had happened.

They reached the vault opening.

Barry staggered into the chamber with Dalton close at his heels. He pulled up short, almost knocking Dalton over.

"Joan!"

Barry screamed the word out. Zaleikka was standing over her, one of the disintegrating weapons in her hand. She was aiming it at the girl!

Barry rushed forward. Zaleikka looked up. She saw Barry coming toward her. A wild laugh flew from her lips. She screamed out at him.

"You are too late! I gave you your chance! Now it is I who will rule! I will wipe your race from the earth! You will die—now!"

Barry knew he could never reach her in time. Her words echoed through the vast chamber and he heard Dalton sobbing behind him. Zaleikka had the deadly box turned toward the girl. Her hand was reaching for the lever—

She suddenly straightened. She staggered backward, a sharp little cry bursting from her lips. Barry faltered in his mad rush. His steps slowed. He was watching Zaleikka's face.

A change was taking place! Her skin was turning gray, hollows were forming in her cheeks, her hair was silvering and falling, and her body was shrinking and twisting!

A single cry fled from the gaping hole that had been her mouth. The disintegrator fell with a loud crash to the floor—and Zaleikka crumpled beside it, a growing puddle of grayish dust.

"God! God! God!" Dalton was murmuring. "She turned to dust! Barry—do you see it!"

Barry could see nothing else. He couldn't tear his eyes away from it. Moments before a beautiful woman had stood there. Now there was nothing, nothing but a pile of dust upon the stone floor. It was like a floodgate opening in his mind. He suddenly knew everything—all those hints Anubis had made. The papyrus at Karnak. He had said there were things that Zaleikka herself didn't know. He had spoken of a time element. The silver flask. The liquid spilling on the floor.

Zaleikka had been sent into the future for only one purpose—to open the Sphinx for a Priest of the Pharaohs—she had been doomed to die immediately after! Khafre had left nothing to chance!

Barry heard a soft sobbing sound. He was suddenly aware again of his surroundings. He glanced around him.

Joan Forrest was swaying on her feet, her hands over her eyes, wracking sobs shaking her body.

"Joan!" Barry ran to her.

She threw herself into his arms. "Barry—Barry! It was horrible—I knew everything that was happening but I couldn't do anything. That woman . . ."

A lump was pounding in Barry Randall's throat. The world was in his arms. A soft clinging world.

"Barry—Joan!" Dalton gasped out behind them.

Barry turned his head. Dalton was pointing nervously to the floor. Barry glanced down. A shout rose to his lips. The disintegrating box! The lever had been snapped off when it hit the floor and—

A SHRILL whining sound grew in volume. Tiny heatless flames licked out from the box, spreading slowly. The stone floor began to dissolve around it. The flames spread, began touching the slabs, the walls, and reached out toward the dead body of Hassan.

A rumble grew. The floor shook be-

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neath their feet. A tinkling whistle shrilled in their ears.

"We've got to get out of here!" Barry shouted. "That machine—something's happened to it!"

Joan screamed in terror. Barry grabbed her arm, and then they were running.

Into the tunnel. Through the labyrinth. And behind them the noise grew louder. The stone walls of the tunnel were trembling. Bits of stone fell at their flying feet. The amber lamps began flickering.

To Barry it seemed as if they were running forever. His legs were pieces of rubber, and beside him Joan Forrest was gasping. He could hear Dalton pounding from behind.

There was an explosion. Part of the tunnel collapsed behind, amidst a deafening thunder.

The roof sagged ahead of them. Barry prayed. He tried to form words with his lips but his tongue was stiff. Joan was staggering against him. She wouldn't be able to go much further.

They were under it. They felt the stone ceiling groan, crack, and crumble. There was another deafening explosion from behind.

They reached the steps to the temple. Behind them the lights flickered out, a howl of twisting forces crashed as the tunnel caved in.

They crawled up the steps. Barry dragged the girl beside him.

Then they were out.

THEY staggered through the debris of the temple and out onto the sand, a cool night wind moving about them. Overhead, the Moon hung full and bright in a star-flecked sky.

Barry looked across the moonlit scene, his arm supporting the exhausted form of Joan Forrest. Suddenly he stared. "Look!" he whispered.

Dalton and the girl followed his gaze. They gasped softly.

A half mile away loomed the bulking figure of the Sphinx. For thousands of years it had stood there, motionless. But now it was no longer still. It *trembled* visibly, shaking itself like some awakening monster.

A moaning sigh rose on the night wind. It grew louder, ever louder. And with it came a series of muffled subterranean blasts.

Barry, with Dalton and the girl rigid beside him, saw the Sphinx begin to settle like a tired giant, lower—lower until only its head was level with the sand around it. Its shadow across the sand grew shorter as the huge structure slowly faded from view.

Barry's arm tightened about Joan. The dwindling shadow of the Sphinx was somehow symbolic. It was like a veil of evil being lifted from the world.

Awe-struck, frozen, they watched. The moaning sound faded. The shadow of the sinking Sphinx grew shorter, ever shorter—

And finally was gone . . .

THE END

TRANSPLANTING ANIMAL HEARTS

PROFESSOR Nikolai Sinitsin of the Gorky Medical Institute in Moscow has successfully transplanted hearts into warm blooded animals, such as rabbits, cats and dogs.

The heart was transplanted onto the animal's neck and put in circuit with the blood circulation system.

Hearts that were transplanted retained their own individual rhythm. The operated animals do not show any shortness of breath, spasms or excessive excitation after the operation. They reacted normally to all external exciters, such as light, sound and pain.

Experiments are constantly being conducted in transplanting of hearts. This work is expected to provide a valuable method for studying various problems of heart physiology and treatment of heart disease.—*Pete Bogg.*

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Herbert was so intent in studying the fishing reel that he didn't notice until it was too late that something was wrong

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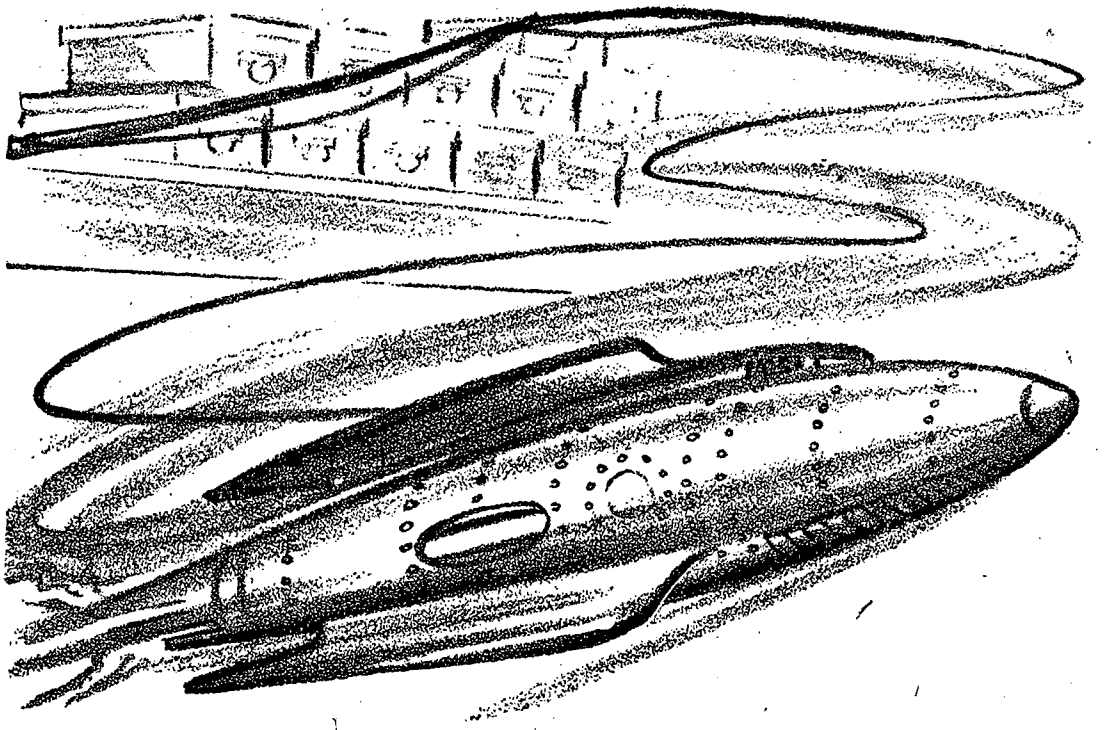

Rocket to Limbo

by Margaret St. Clair

Smith and Tinkem operated a strange sort of business. They got rid of people for a price—and the bill was sent to limbo.

MILLIE waved to Herbert, who was getting into the 'copter, and flashed him a wide, insincere smile.

The big chump, she was thinking, don't 'copters ever have wrecks? No, he'll be back at five, safe and sound, and start scolding me about the grocery bills and do I really need another dress and wouldn't I like to have a baby because I'm so restless!

No, I would not like to have a baby, and if a new dress costs too much, how does he think we could afford a baby, anyhow? All he does is complain at me and tell me what to do and get in my way. Nag, nag, nag. He thought the way I acted before we were married was cute, now he fusses at me about the very things he used to like me for.

The big 'copter was out of sight by now. Millie let the corners of her mouth sag; her face took on its normal expression of slight petulance. She

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prodded for a moment at the intricate spirals of her orchid-tinted hair with her iridescent fingernails and then moved over to the book stand. A good mystery, that was what she needed, something to cheer her up.

She selected two plectoid-covered detective stories, picked out three candy bars, and handed them to the clerk with a dollar bill. Abstractedly—he had been deep in conversation with a customer at the other end of the counter when Millie motioned to him—he punched up the sale on the register and handed her her change and sales slip.

Millie put her purchase in her hand case. She was about to let the sales slip fall on the ground when a word on it caught her eye. She read:

"Disposals, neatly and quickly made. Are you HAPPY? Is someone getting in your WAY? DON'T PUT UP WITH IT! We specialize in quiet, safe disposal of human obstacles. No mess, no fuss, no blood. See Smith and Tinkem, 1908 Alamondola, suite three. All inquiries confidential."

It was a very funny thing to find on the back of a sales slip. Millie glanced sharply at the clerk. He had gone back to his conversation and was paying absolutely no attention to her. She turned the slip over two or three times, wondering what it was all about, and finally folded it and put it in her case. What did it mean, anyway?

Is someone getting in your way? . . . No mess, no fuss, no blood. Millie bit her lips. It sounded almost as if—as if someone *knew* how she felt about Herbert. It must be some kind of joke, some sort of advertising scheme.

She left the 'copter terminal and started out to the parking lot where she had left the family scooterbile. That was another thing, she was crazy for a real car, but Herbert said it would cost too much. Everything she wanted cost too much, and yet, the money he spent on rods and reels, on flies and fishing tackle! She had seen some of the bills last month and had asked him about them. They had had a dreadful quarrel.

Oh, what a nuisance he was!

Perched insecurely on the seat of the scooterbile, threading it deftly in and out of traffic, Millie felt, not for the first time, that she hated him.

SHE got home early, cleaned the house in an hour, and had a light lunch, with her candy bars for dessert. She ate slowly, turning the pages of the books she had bought and trying to get interested in them. They seemed awfully dull, somehow; she couldn't help thinking about that ad the clerk had given her, and wondering what it meant. After a while she went to her hand case, got the slip out, and studied it again. By two o'clock she was dressed in her black nilofilm, her hair fixed that new way with the sequins, and on her way to 1908 Alamondola.

She drove around the block twice before she parked in front of it. It was a big, old-fashioned building, the kind they had put up forty years ago, of greenish concrete, with many angles and zigzags of metal work. Suite three was on the second floor.

The office girl, though, was thoroughly modern, Millie decided, scrutinizing her. Her forearms had been sprayed with gold dust, and she was wearing slippers with enormous whirlabees.

". . . Is Mr. Smith in?" Millie asked, swallowing.

"You wanted to see him about a disposal?" the girl replied. "Yes. Please be seated." She motioned to a chair. "There's a video in the top of that table

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there, if you want to look at anything." She watched while Millie seated herself, and then went back to her desk.

Millie looked around the office. She was feeling dreadfully nervous, and the big, old-fashioned room, so sedate and respectable-looking, hardly reassured her. Was it all going to turn out to be a joke? Would she get arrested because she wanted to—to dispose of Herbert?

When, twenty minutes later, the office girl held the little swinging gate open for her and showed her to the inner room where Mr. Smith was sitting, her knees were unsteady and the palms of her hands were damp.

Mr. Smith was a long, lean man. His cheeks were hollow, with a bluish cast, and he wore a small, stringy bow tie. He motioned Millie to a chair with a wave of his left hand.

"Madam was interested in a disposal?" He asked, coming to the point at once.

"D-d-disposal?" Millie echoed. She couldn't help stammering.

"A disposal of some individual whom madam—ah—considers superfluous?" His eyes flickered down over the zircoridium-set wedding band on Millie's left hand. "Madam is married, is she not?"

Millie inclined her neck about three inches to make a stiff nod. It was the best she could manage at the moment.

"We have several excellent disposal services," Mr. Smith said, "but the best and most popular one is our rocket special. It is priced at five hundred dollars, which includes everything. For that sum, we *guarantee* disposal to be absolute, permanent, and complete, with no possibility of an—ah—a kickback. Since disposal is one hundred percent efficient, there is never any unpleasantness for our clients, of a legal nature or otherwise." Mr. Smith paused. He laced his fingers together over his stomach and looked at Millie with a sort of cold benignity.

"But how—I mean—well, how does it work?" Millie asked. She was playing nervously with the clasp of her hand case, snapping it open and shutting it again.

MR. SMITH coughed and cleared his throat. "Let us suppose, for the sake of simplicity," he said, "that the person of whom madam desires to dispose is her husband. Very well. On next Tuesday, between the hours of one and five, if he goes to the fifth floor of Bracey's department store and asks for any one of a list of commodities which I shall indicate to madam, he will become the object of our disposal service. The clerk at Bracey's—who is, of course, a member of our organization—will prepare him properly. When madam's husband awakens, he will be aboard our own privately-owned, especially chartered rocket ship." Mr. Smith halted with an air of finality.

". . . I don't get it," Millie said at last.

"I mean that madam's husband—assuming that he is the person of whom madam desires to dispose—" (for an instant a nasty little light shone at the back of Mr. Smith's eyes) "will be disposed of permanently. No mess, no fuss, no blood. He will merely have taken a long, a very long, rocket trip."

"You mean he gets on a rocket and the rocket never comes back? But where does it go to?" Millie asked. Something about Mr. Smith almost frightened her.

"To limbo, madam. To limbo. That is the best way of explaining it." Mr. Smith made Millie a little bow. "The fee is five hundred dollars," he said somewhat pointedly, "payable in advance."

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"Five hundred dollars? That's an awful lot. Herb—" She bit off the word in confusion. She had been about to say that Herbert would never forgive her if she spent that much on something he didn't approve of.

"May I point out to madam," Mr. Smith said, looking down at his fingernails, "that after Tuesday, Herb, whoever he may be, will have no connection with madam whatever. She need have no concern about his reaction to anything she does. He will not be here to react. He will not be anywhere."

Millie opened her hand bag and got out her checkbook. She could always stop payment on it if it turned out to be a fake. "Now about this list you mentioned . . ." she said.

AN HOUR later she was on her way home, the list in her hand case. Mr. Smith had made several helpful suggestions on it. He had pointed out that she must make use of the psychology of the individual of whom she wished to dispose in order to get him to go to Bracey's. (Neither she nor Mr. Smith had ever alluded to Herbert by name.)

One of the items on the list was a counter-weighted, corrosion-resistant, anti-magnetic magnesium all fishing reel; and Mr. Smith had taught her a few conversational gambits and had suggested several tactics to be sure that Herbert went to Bracey's on Tuesday and asked for it. If Herbert failed to respond, she was to go back to 1908 Alamondola Street next week and get a new list. Mr. Smith had assured her that there was no limit to the service his firm was prepared to give in order to make sure that the disposal was consummated and complete. He seemed a nice man, really, but there was something about his eyes . . .

She met Herbert at the 'copter terminal at five. Poor old Herbie, she thought as she kissed him, I almost like him now that I know he's not going to bother me any more. She chattered gaily to him all the way home, and when they got to the house she had him sit down and rest instead of asking him to fix the tap on the kitchen sink, as she had intended to. She even got one of his favorite frozen meals out of the refrigerator to thaw for supper, and sat patiently waiting after their meal while he read the paper and smoked his cigar.

The important thing, Mr. Smith had told her, was to be sure the subject came up naturally. She mustn't seem to push or force the conversation around. Herbert, as he was putting the paper away, gave her a beautiful opening.

"The *Fish Tales* column says local fishermen report record catches of bass," he remarked. "I'll have to see if I can't get out some week end soon."

"Oh? That reminds me, I saw Jim Gardener today." Jim was a fellow-fisherman and long-time rival of her husband's; he always seemed to catch more fish and bigger ones than Herbert did, and Herbert, Millie knew, was jealous.

"You did? What did he have to say?"

"Oh, he talked my arm off about some new kind of reel he got. He says it's the biggest improvement in fishing since the invention of the fly."

"Hm." Herbert was looking interested. "Where'd he get it?"

"At—let me see, now—at Maxwell's. He talked so much about it, I can't help remembering some of the things he said. Counter-weighted, anti-magnetic, and—unh—corrosion-resistant. Made of magnesium, or something. He says there won't be another one in town until next Tuesday."

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"Oh." Herbert was looking disappointed. "Will Maxwell's have it in stock then?"

MILLIE shook her head. She was trying not to show her excitement at how beautifully Mr. Smith's suggestions were working out. "Not Maxwell's. He said something about Braceys' getting in a shipment on Tuesday afternoon. Isn't there a tackle shop on their fifth floor?"

"Yep. You bet there is. I might look in there on Tuesday myself. Jim Gardener doesn't need to think he's the only man in town who can have a new reel."

"Herbert!" Millie forced alarm into her voice. "Oh, don't tell me you're going to spend more money on fishing! Why, Jim said the reel cost so much Nora was still scolding him about it. Herbert! Oh, I wish I'd never mentioned it."

Herbert's lips set in a thin line. "Now, Millie," he said, "after all I earn the living. If I want to buy myself a few little things once in a while, I guess I have a right to. And I certainly need a new reel." He got up and folded his paper neatly and put it on top the video.

Millie felt a wild elation. That Mr. Smith certainly knew his stuff. Herbert would go to Bracey's now on Tuesday, she was sure. Wild horses wouldn't be able to keep him away. And after Tuesday, no Herbert. Disposed of neatly. Gone to limbo.

THE days moved on toward Tuesday. Millie played six-suit bridge with the girls a couple of afternoons, and she and Beata went shopping on Saturday and Millie got a new hand case and gauntlets.

Herbert blew his top about them, of course; she'd known he would. Ordinarily they'd have had a big fight, but the prospect of disposing of Herbert for good had made Millie more even-tempered than usual. Her attitude seemed to surprise Herbert; she caught him looking at her rather oddly several times during the evening, and he kept talking about criminal extravagance.

He watched her sourly all the time she was undressing for bed, while she took the sequins and bubble pearls out of her hair, and when the light had snapped out and she was lying on her serifroth mattress, he began fussing again.

"The amount you women spend on your hair these days is an outrage," he observed nastily into the darkness. (Millie couldn't see him, but she could imagine how he must look, lying on his back with his arms under his head and a frown over his rather small blue eyes as he addressed the ceiling.) "I saw that old friend of yours today, Jara—what's her name?—Cather, and she was fixed up like a floater in a para review. Everything in her hair but the atomic range."

Millie stiffened on her pillow. She had known Jara Cather all her life, and she had always been envious of her. Jara had always had more of everything than Millie had—more money, more looks, more boy friends, and even, more good marks in school.

"Well, she can afford it, I guess," she answered. "Bob has a wonderful job."

"Not that wonderful. She said her hair cost forty dollars a week the new way she's wearing it."

"What was it like?" Millie asked curiously. She wanted very much to know.

"Oh, all sorts of colors, a regular rainbow, and a big bunch of shiny grapes and vegetables on top. She said it was fluorescent or something. Called it a polaroid-prismatic garnish or

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something like that."

"Garniture," Millie corrected automatically. Herbert's description of Jara's hair-do sounded like something she'd seen in *Flicker-Facts*.

"Um. Well, anyhow, it looked like the devil on sticks. I don't know what's the matter with women these days."

"Where did she get it fixed, do you know?" Millie queried, trying to keep her interest from appearing in her voice.

"Oh, some blasted beauty shop—Bruxelles', I think she said. She told me it took two women the whole day to do it, and it made such a mess the shop would only arrange hair that way one day out of the whole week. Tuesdays. Why, when I was a boy, my mother got a permanent—that's what they called them then, permanents—at the neighborhood beauty parlor and she fixed her hair at home, with those little straight pins, herself. It looked like a million dollars, too, not like these damned salads the women . . ."

MILLIE had ceased listening to h im. Tuesdays! What a wonderful way to spend Tuesday, while Herbert was being disposed of! She'd 'phone in for the appointment on Monday, spend all day Tuesday at the shop, having her hair fixed with a garniture like Jara's, and come out in the evening looking really nice and no Herbert to spoil it by scolding her.

What a wonderful time she was going to have—there was over three thousand dollars in the savings account in the bank, even after that check to Mr. Smith, and the stocks and bonds besides. Really the disposal service was cheap at the price, when she considered all she was going to gain by it. A wonderful time, she thought drowsily, and drifted off to sleep.

Monday she called the shop and made the appointment and on Tuesday after she'd kissed Herbert good-bye at the 'copter terminal (a longer kiss than usual, and more affectionate, though she had a hard time to keep from laughing when he said he'd see her that evening) she drove across town in the scooterbile to Bruxelles'.

Bruxelles' was definitely a swank place, out of her price class ordinarily, and she'd never been there before. It took her a moment or two of teetering outside on the pavement before she could get her courage up and go in.

Contrary to her fears, the attendant at the reception desk was extremely polite. "Polaroid-prismatic garniture?" she said. "Yes, Mrs. Stevens. If you will just step this way, please . . ." She led Millie back through a corridor carpeted with softly glowing chromamoss and seated her in the deepest of armchairs in an elegant little room. Millie looked at her watch; it was just ten o'clock.

The first part of the polaroid-prismatic garniture was just like any other hair-do; detergent treatment, scalp and foot massage (only they used an electric vibrator between her toes to help relax the hair follicles in the scalp), egg fluff, and hand brushing. There was an interval at noon during which they brought Millie an assortment of sandwiches (bollo tongue, turken, and caviar) and a shaker of iced tangranate juice, and then the special part began.

Telling her to close her eyes and relax, the two women attendants began stroking a heavy, sparkling oil over her hair. The woman on the right drew up a small machine which began making a deep, soothing drone—it had something to do with the polarity—and the woman on the left began to spray a cloud of pinkish stuff over Millie's scalp. Millie felt delightfully com-

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fortable and relaxed. She opened one eye and looked quickly at her watch. It was just one o'clock.

One o'clock . . . Herbert was probably asking for the fishing reel at Bracey's now. He would probably stop in on his way back to the office after lunch. In a very few moments the disposal process would begin, and here she, Millie, was at Bruxelles', feeling so wonderfully comfortable, getting her hair fixed.

How agreeable getting the polaroid-prismatic garniture was! They had stopped spraying the pink stuff on her hair now, and the woman on the left was swathing Millie's head in lovely warm towels with a delicious violet scent. Millie felt she could go right off to sleep. With her eyes closed, lying there, she felt as if she were drifting slowly down through clouds of soft pink snow, and the snow was falling upward around her. Delightful . . . And in all the upward falling pink snow, all through it, there was no Herbert anywhere.

SHE looked at her watch. Seven o'clock. Seven o'clock? Why, the shop closed at six. Why hadn't they called her? Millie scrambled to her feet.

Where was she? This wasn't Bruxelles'. Astonished and beginning to be afraid, Millie looked around the little room.

It was a tiny place, about six feet square, with a bunk against one wall and a mirror and wash basin opposite. The light in the ceiling gave off a discouraged, dismal, blue-green glow.

Her polaroid-prismatic garniture still in her mind, Millie crossed over to the mirror and looked at herself.

They had never finished her hair. The oil they had been rubbing in had never been removed, and the pink powder was still dusted on it. What on earth had happened? What was all this?

Feeling really frightened, Millie went to the door and turned the knob. To her intense relief, it opened, and she stepped out into a little hall. There were other doors along it; it seemed to lead into a sort of salon. Nervously, walking with light steps, Millie followed it.

The salon was a room of fair size, lighted by the same ghastly bluish-green. A man was standing at one of the windows, looking out, his back to her. Softly, timidly, Millie walked up.

She must have made some noise, for, when she was about ten feet away, he turned to face her. It was Herbert.

"Well, Millie," he said heavily, "I guess we must have tried the same thing on each other. We're—how d'you say—in the same boat."

Millie looked at him. Her heart was beating with horrible rapidity. Herbert . . . Here . . .

"What—" she said, her tongue feeling thick and stiff, "what — where are we?"

"Why, we're on a rocket ship. Where it is, I don't really know. Maybe not in our universe at all. See, there're no stars." He gestured toward the visiplates through which he had been looking. There was no arcing of stars (Millie had gone by rocket to the moon one year) no planetary discs, no nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing but black.

"But where—where's it going?"

He looked at her under his eyebrows. "To limbo. Just as Mr. Smith said. To limbo, of course."

And Millie sank to the floor, hysterical sobs shaking her.

"I DON'T see how you do it, Smith," the office girl said. She was sitting

(Concluded on page 110)

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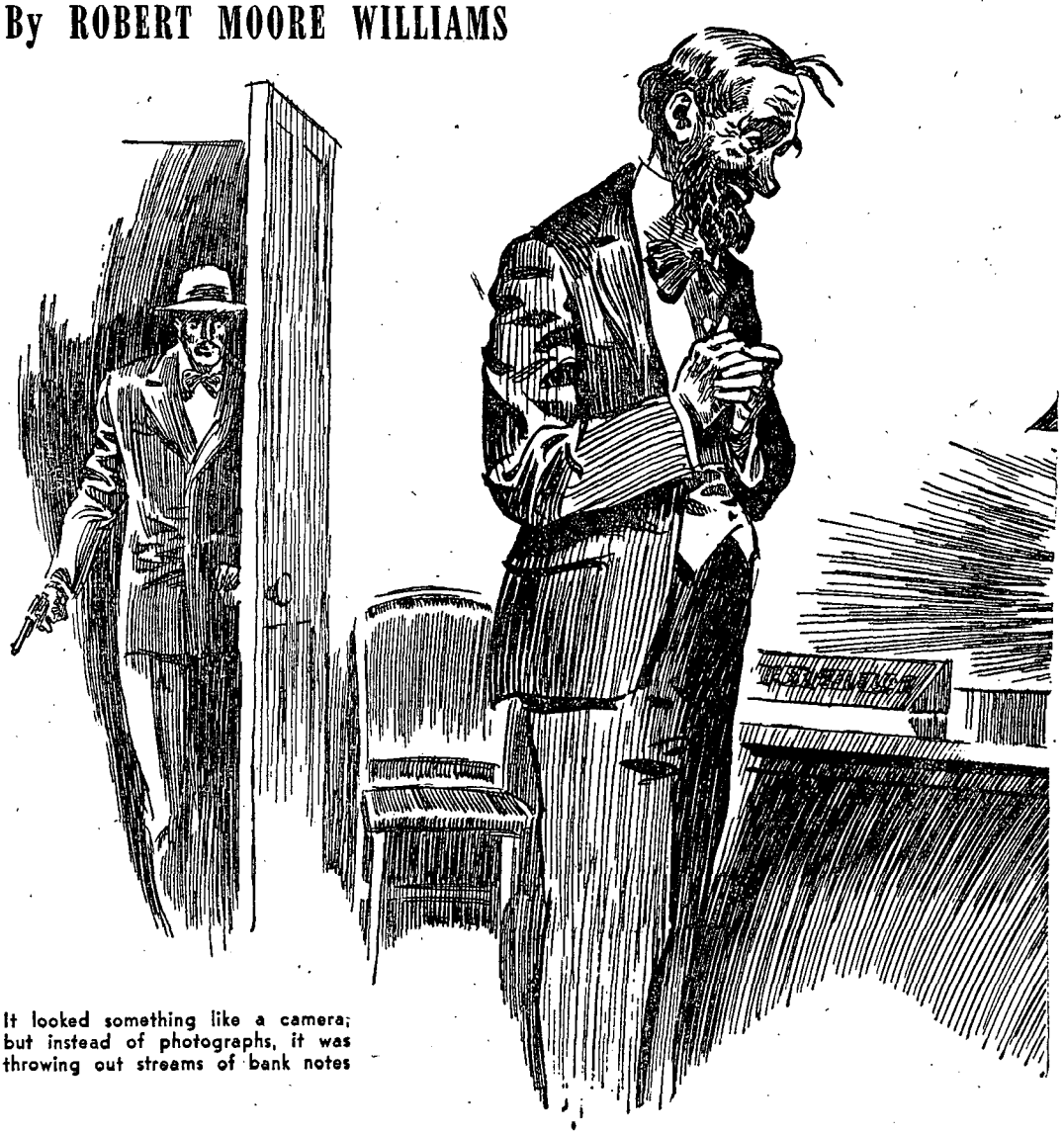
The COUNTERFEITER

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



It looked something like a camera; but instead of photographs, it was throwing out streams of bank notes

"THERE'S a man to see you, Mr. Gray," my secretary said.

"I'm too busy to see anyone," I answered.

She looked at the stacks of hundred dollar bills on my desk and at Hinkle, sitting across from me. Hinkle and I were busy, too busy to see anybody about anything. "Tell him to come back tomorrow."

"But he insists," the girl protested.

"Then have the guard—" This was as far as I got. The girl, standing in the doorway of my office, was gently

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He was just a little man, but he had a machine with very peculiar abilities. It could duplicate things . . .

shoved aside. A little man, bent almost double with the weight of the huge box he was carrying on one shoulder, puffed his way into the room. He was wearing a black derby hat, an old black suit, and a gray shirt with a patent leather bow tie. His face, lined and wrinkled, sported a short, neatly trimmed black beard.

He looked as old as the hills and maybe older.

"I vant to speek to someone," he said vaguely. Because I was seated in the swivel chair, he picked me as the im-

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portant person in the room, and concentrated his gaze on my face.

I expected him to open up his box and try to sell me something out of it.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm too busy to see anyone just now. If you will come back in two or three days, I'll be glad to see you, Mr.—"

"Arken," he supplied. "Yoseph Arken." His eyes came to rest on the stacks of bills lying on my desk.

"Yah," he said, the beard nodding a little sadly. "I see you are busy. It may be dot I am de reason you are so busy—"

Sitting across the desk from me, I heard Ed Hinkle take a deep breath and then stop breathing. I don't know whether or not I stopped breathing, but I do know that from this instant on Mr. Joseph Arken had my full and undivided attention.

I AM executive vice-president of the Pine Street Bank and Trust Company, in St. Louis, Missouri. The executive part of my title means that I am actually in charge of the bank, that I pass on all important loans, that I make all decisions on policy, that I do the hiring and the firing—unless I am hiring or firing a director's nephew—in short, that I take all the responsibility, do most of the work, and get damned little of the money. It also means that when something goes wrong, I'm the guy who gets his head chopped off.

There was something wrong this morning, something plenty wrong. It had started when Hinkle, who is as expert a teller as ever rippled a stack of bills through agile fingers, had discovered he had a counterfeit hundred dollar bill among the money in his cage. He had brought the bill in to me, dumping his troubles in my lap, and we had begun to check all our bills. So far, we had discovered exactly eighteen counterfeit hundred dollar bills in the bank's funds.

Eighteen counterfeit hundred dollar bills amounts to eighteen hundred dollars. That's not much money in terms of the national debt but let any bank discover it has been taking in counterfeit bills and watch the president, the board of directors, and every blasted employee in the place start running in circles. Queer money is something every banker hates with an undying hatred that verges on insanity.

We had eighteen hundred dollars worth of queer money on hand.

Not only were the bills counterfeit, but they were that much sought after but never before attained brand, perfect counterfeits. The picture, the engraving, the threads in the paper, the ink, the design, all these things were exactly right. The bills felt good, they rattled right, they looked perfect enough to have been made from the original plates. They looked so good that I would guarantee to go into any bank in the United States and have one of them accepted as genuine. I wouldn't guarantee to have two of them accepted because the second one would get me into trouble if the teller was on his toes, which indicates what was wrong with them.

They all had the same number.

Hinkle and I were busy checking numbers when Arken walked into my office. When he rather sadly said maybe he was the reason we were so busy, my bloodpressure took a big jump.

Counterfeiters happen. As long as men continue to use money, somebody will always think he can counterfeit it. The crooks can't beat this game, the Federal men get them every time, but they're always trying.

They try, but never in the history of banking has a counterfeiter walked into

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a bank and announced his occupation. This was exactly what Arken had done, if I understood him correctly.

"What do you mean, Mr.—ah—Arken?" I kept my voice calm.

THE beard wagged again. "You are looking at de money. I am sorry but it may be dot some of dot money is bad!"

Hinkle expelled his breath in a long sigh.

My secretary was still standing in the doorway, a puzzled expression on her face. I shooed her out. "I'm seeing no one from now on." I turned to Arken. "Now, if you please—"

Puffing and blowing, he was turning around, easing the big box from his shoulder to a chair.

"Sooo heavy, de box is," he said, puffing. He took off his derby hat, wiped sweat from a head as bald as an egg, clamped the hat back on, and glared fiercely at me.

"Dis I keep in my basement," he said, pointing to the box. "I t'ink no one knows about it. Today I discover dat somebody has been slipping in at night and using it to make bad money."

The counterfeiter had not only come in but he had brought his equipment with him!

"I am werry sorry dot dis has happened," Arken continued. The glare changed to an apologetic smile.

"Sorry!" I exploded, then caught myself. It was all right for him to be sorry but being sorry wasn't near enough, not when you have had any connection whatsoever with the manufacture or distribution of hot money. Every counterfeiter on earth is sorry for what he has done, after he's caught. The F.B.I. could distill sorrow by the jugfull out of any crook after the bracelets are around his wrists.

At this point I realized that Arken hadn't been caught. He had come in of his own free will. The police hadn't brought him in. He had brought himself in.

"All right," I said. "I'm willing to listen, but your story had better be good."

"Better be good?" he repeated, as if he hadn't understood.

I nodded. "It doesn't have to be good so far as I'm concerned but no matter what happens I have to report the counterfeit bills we have found. I've had enough experience with the Federal men to know that your story had better be good when you tell it to them."

Arken looked sad again, shaking his head and blinking his eyes at me. "Yah," he said. "I know. But it is innocent I am, of making bad money. I did not know my invention was being using dat way. Somebody slipped in at night. See, I vill show you—"

THAT was his story. Maybe it was the truth. Maybe somebody had been slipping in without his knowledge. And again, maybe there was a lot of these hundred dollar bills in circulation and maybe the Federal men were on Arken's tail right now, and he, knowing he was about to be caught, had dreamed up this cock and bull story to give himself an alibi.

It was his equipment, wasn't it? If he was so innocent, how did it happen that he had counterfeiting equipment in his possession? Any man found with engraved plates, paper, special ink, in his possession, has to do a lot of talking to keep himself out of the penitentiary. There is no other use for counterfeiting equipment except to make bad money.

"I vill show you," Arken repeated. "I vill show you. You vill be de judge."

His accent was bad, his English halting and slow. Whoever he was, wher-

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ever he had come from, he hadn't been born in this country. The way he spoke revealed this much about him.

He lifted the lid off his box, took a coil of wire out of it, looked around for a wall plug. While he was hunting for the outlet, Hinkle and I peeked into the box.

"Well, I'm damned!" Hinkle said, looking quickly up. "If that's a set of counterfeiting tools, then I'm a monkey's uncle!"

The box contained what at first glance looked like an old-fashioned large size folding camera. It had been rebuilt so much that very little was left of the original equipment but apparently the camera was the heart of the device. It contained an intricate set of odd-shaped lenses which seemed to focus on a glass tray that was firmly fixed to the bottom of the box. The whole top of the box was taken up by the oddest shaped light I have ever seen that seemed to be a combination radio tube and ultra violet heat lamp. Three separate coils of wire ran from the lamp down to the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box.

"I don't get it," Hinkle said. "I don't begin to get it."

He was a little scared, even then.

Arken, clucking like an old hen, pushed us aside. He didn't like to have us looking inside his box.

"I vill demonstrate," he kept saying. "I vill demonstrate. You shall judge if I knew about de bad money.

FIRMLY stoppered and wired in one corner of the box was a quart bottle. It was made of some queer kind of glass. I had never seen anything like it before. Arken unwrapped the wires, carefully removed the stopper, and poured a portion of the contents of the bottle into the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box. He handled the bottle very carefully and he took great pains to make certain he did not spill any of its contents.

A coal black, sirupy liquid came out of the bottle. It was an odd liquid. It flowed readily yet it seemed to cling together something like mercury. It was live with tiny pin-points of exploding light. I had the impression, though I knew I was wrong, that I could see atoms bursting in that black liquid, single atoms exploding one by one.

"Dis," Arken said, "is de matrix."

Carefully stoppering the bottle, he wired it back into its place in the corner of the box.

He rubbed his hands together, peered at the black liquid in the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box. "Dot matrix is de most wunderful substance on earth. Dere is nussing like it on dis or any udder planet. Dere is nussing like it anywhere else in de whole uniwerse, may be."

He cooed like a mother bending over a cradle.

Hinkle looked at me, pointed his index finger at his forehead, and traced circles in the air. Had we caught a nut, I wondered too. Arken looked like he might have wandered out of the booby hatch and the junk inside the box looked like it had been put together by a nut. I didn't say anything. Sometimes it's hard to tell a candidate for the padded cell and a genius apart.

"That's a pretty big claim you're making," I said.

"Hah?" he glared at me.

"You said there is nothing like that black liquid any where in the universe. That's all right, but the universe is a pretty big place."

"Dot I know, dot I know. But de matrix, it is somes'ing special, it is somes'ing like nussing ever before made in all de uniwerse, may be I t'ink. Now for somes'ing to duplicate—" He

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looked around the office and his eyes came to rest on the stack of bills on my desk.

"Do you mind if maybe I use one—" he questioned.

"It's your party and your funeral," I told him.

HE PICKED up one of the bills, lovingly examined it, then slipped it into position inside the crazy camera inside the box, bending the wire prongs that served as holders until they held the bill in just the right position. Then he snapped a switch. Simultaneously a soft ticking began in the box and the combination radio tube and sun lamp bulb began to glow. The glow got brighter and brighter, became blue-white, got brighter than the flame of a welding torch, got blinding. The light passed downward through a narrow slit and was focused on the hundred dollar bill. Arken adjusted the focus. Part of the light passed through the bill and flowing downward through the intricate series of lenses, was focused on the tray of black liquid in the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box.

No visible change took place in the liquid.

So far as I could see, nothing was happening, but Arken watched the proceedings with the intent alertness of a cat at a mouse hole.

The ticking sound stopped.

When the ticking stopped, the light was automatically turned off.

Arken pulled a tiny pair of glass tongs out of his pockets, fished raptly in the coal black liquid.

"Ah!" he said.

He pulled a rectangular piece of green paper out of the matrix, flourished it before our eyes.

It looked like a hundred dollar bill.

Hinkle couldn't keep his hands off of that piece of paper. He snatched it out of Arken's fingers, scrutinized it, twisted it in his hands. It rattled sharply, a sound that only new money can make. Hinkle looked at me. His face was the color of ashes.

"If I hadn't seen it come out of that black goo, I would swear it was a perfectly good bill," he whispered. "If anybody passed it in to me, I'd take it without asking any questions. Look at it, will you? Look at it!" He handed the bill to me.

"It's a perfect duplicate of the bill he put into the box," Hinkle said. "See, the original has a slight tear on one edge. The tear is duplicated. And the number is the same."

Snatching the original bill out of the wire prongs that held it in position, he held it up for comparison.

Hair by hair, line by line, number by number, tint by tint, the two bills were identical. The original bill had been creased where it had been folded. The new bill reproduced the crease. The original had been printed a little off center, a minting error. The new bill duplicated that error.

"Vot did I tell you?" Arken said, satisfaction in his voice. "Vot did I tell you?"

The black beard wagging vigorously up and down, he was grinning like a kid on Christmas morning.

IF I had been working in a bank in New York, or Chicago, or San Francisco, and this had happened, I wouldn't maybe have been so much surprised. Strange things happen in those cities. But St. Louis is a town where nothing miraculous ever happens. Oh, I know the Browns won a pennant a couple of years ago, and that was a miracle if ever miracles happen, but St. Louis is not a town where you can expect to have a little baldheaded, black bearded runt come walking into your office and

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plunk down a box that contains the only perfect counterfeiting machine ever invented. Maybe in New York—

But this *was* St. Louis and this little guy *had* come puffing into my office and he *did* have a machine that worked miracles. It wasn't a machine, of course, but I call it a machine because I don't know what else to call it.

"I'm not trying to pry," I spoke. "But would you mind telling me how in the devil that blasted machine works?"

The black beard wagged again, this time from side to side. "Dot is some-s'sing I am not willing to reweal, joost now."

"I'm not trying to steal it!" I snapped.

"I know *you* are not but udder people might be thiefs may be."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?" I challenged.

The black eyes glowed at the question. "Vot I am going to do, *vot* am I going to do? Ah! Dere as so many t'ings I am going to do. All my life I have worked on dis, so I could do some of de t'ings I have in my heart." He rapped his chest as he spoke, a gesture that in anybody else would have been melodramatic. In Arken it merely emphasized the way he felt.

In his next words I got a picture of what he had in his mind, of the feelings in the heart he pounded so fervently and fiercely.

"My friend, dere are poor people in dis world. Dere are kids who do not have shoes, who do not have enough to eat. Right here in dis big city we have dem. Ah! How well I know we have dem! My friend," he glared at me as if somehow I was keeping the kids from having enough to eat, "when I am finish wit dis inwention I have in dis box, der will be no kids nor anybody else who do not have enough to eat in de whole world may be!"

HIS words, the hot way he used them, opened my eyes a yard wide. When he demonstrated his machine, I had thought he was just another counterfeiter trying to pull a fast one. Maybe he was a counterfeiter but he was something else too, he was one of the great souls who spend their lives trying to better the lot of suffering humanity. I hadn't the faintest idea how his machine would help the kids who didn't have enough to eat but I was willing to believe that he knew how and I was willing to credit the honesty—

"Just don't get excited," a voice said in my ear. "Just don't get excited and you won't get hurt."

I'll never know how I managed to keep from jumping except that there was something in the voice that told me to keep very still. I didn't move.

"I'm talking to all three of you," the voice continued. "Don't raise your hands, don't do anything that will attract attention. Yes, this is a gun I have in my hand and I know how to use it."

Something round and hard was being pushed against my backbone. It froze me to the spot. Arken glanced over my shoulder toward the door and his eyes opened wide. Hinkle didn't move a muscle.

"Now you can turn around," the voice said. The pressure relaxed on my backbone. I turned very slowly.

Three men had come silently through the door, had closed it silently behind them. Two of them stood just inside the door. The third one was standing right behind me. He slipped the gun into his pocket as I turned.

He was short and broadshouldered. He was wearing a light gray topcoat of excellent styling and expensive cloth. His hat was gray, his face was swarthy, and his eyes were black-brown. A diamond as big as an agate taw glittered

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on his right hand. Looking at him, you would have thought he was a prosperous business executive and sportsman.

"You can call me Joe," he said. "Joe is not my name but it will do for today."

He looked at Arken, at the box, at Hinkle, at the money piled on my desk, and clicked his tongue. "Too bad we have to let that go. It would be just like finding the dough." He shook his head. "We're after bigger game than hundred dollar bills today."

He looked at Arken and Arken's box. "The boys were a little slow in tipping me off about how big this is. I only got in on it this morning, and when I did get in, I found you had taken a walk. We trailed you here."

THE office was silent. On the street outside a square-wheeled street car went bumping past. A horn blew. Joe wasted no time.

"If you will pick up your box and walk out the front door, I will appreciate it. One of my boys will go along with you, of course. I might mention that all of my boys are very good shots. They have to be, to work for me. *What are you doing, Pappy?*"

The last sentence was addressed to Arken, who had bent over his box and was fumbling around in the bottom of it. He looked up. "I vill go wit you," he said. "But first, de matrix, I must put it back into its bottle."

He pointed to the black liquid in the receptacle on the bottom of the box.

"Okay," Joe said. "But make it snappy."

Arken took his time. He took a small glass funnel out of his pocket, very carefully detached the tray from the bottom of the box, took the stopper out of the bottle and poured the contents of the tray back into it. The glass stopper of the bottle he screwed into place and wired down. Then, without saying a word, he stooped over and picked up the box, hoisted it to his shoulder, puffed through the door, through the lobby of the bank, and out the front. One of the thugs followed closely but unobtrusively behind him.

It was all done so smoothly and so efficiently I didn't realize it was happening until it was finished. Then I said, "Hey!"

"Yes?" Joe said, carbolic acid in his voice.

Silly as it sounds, I had intended to tell him he couldn't do that. I wasn't thinking fast and I hadn't yet fully realized that while this was my office, I wasn't giving the orders in it just now.

I realized it damned soon. The carbolic acid tone in Joe's voice, the look in his eyes, showed me where I was wrong. I shut up. Joe looked at his watch. "They've got away safely. Now if you gentlemen will put on your hats and coats—"

He grinned at the blank look on our faces.

"Of course, you're going along," he said. "I sent Pappy along first because we might make too much commotion if we all went together. However, I wouldn't think of leaving you here to give an alarm before we've made a clean getaway. So if you will just put on your hats and coats and go with us—I might repeat that Mac here and I are both good shots." He nodded at the flat-faced thug with the cauliflower ear who stood just inside the door.

We put our hats and coats on. There was no arguing with this fellow. He had a way about him.

"And if you will just mention to your secretary as we go out that you're going out to lunch and won't be back until after two—"

I nodded.

A few minutes later Hinkle and I

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were sitting in the back seat of a Ford coach. Mac was driving. Joe, turned halfway around in the front seat, was smiling and chatting about the chances of the Browns ever winning another pennant.

At ten o'clock I had been sitting at my desk, a fairly happy executive vice-president of a bank. At ten minutes after ten, Hinkle had come in with the first news about the bad hundred dollar bills. At ten thirty Arken had come puffing in. At eleven o'clock Joe had come.

A hell of a lot had happened to me in one hour!

THEY took us across the Mississippi River to East St. Louis, and when we finally stopped, we were in the back end of a ramshackle garage. At no time did they attempt to blindfold us or to conceal where they were taking us. I would have been a damned sight happier if they had.

There were two cars in the garage. Arken and the thug who had followed him out of the bank were waiting for us. Arken's box was there too.

Joe didn't waste any time. He pointed to the box. "Get it going," he said.

Arken opened the lid, found a plug for his extension cord, carefully poured the black matrix from its bottle into the glass receptacle designed to hold it.

"You have a bill, may be, for me to duplicate?" he hesitatingly asked, when the machine was ready.

"No," Joe said. "No bill this time. You can use this instead of a bill."

He pulled off the ring he was wearing, casually pried the diamond out of its mounting, and handed the stone to Arken.

"I paid five grand for that," he said. "You can work with it."

Arken looked at the ring. His face paled. "No, no!" he protested. "On paper, it vill vork. Not vork on some-s'ng like that."

"Don't try to argue with me," Joe said. "I know more about you than you know I do. Put this diamond into your machine and turn on the juice."

"No!" Arken objected. "I vill not do it."

"Look, Pappy," Joe said.

"No matter vhat you say, I vill not do it."

Joe shrugged. "Okay, Mac," he said.

Mac grinned, stepped forward. His fist swung in a vicious arc. The blow knocked the little inventor clear across the garage. Mac followed him like a cat following a mouse, yanked him to his feet, slapped his head from side to side, walked him back to us.

"What do you say now, Pappy?" Joe asked.

Arken, trembling and dazed, mutely nodded his head.

"That's better," Joe said. "Much better. Get going."

Taking the diamond with trembling fingers, Arken adjusted the wire prongs of the holder so they grasped the stone, minutely adjusted the focus, then turned on the current. The jetting light flared downward, poured through the diamond, and was absorbed into the black matrix. The little timing device ticked softly, then was silent. Using the glass tongs, Arken fished a diamond out of the matrix. It had been formed under the surface, formed out of sight, but it was there.

JOE snatched it from his hands, held it to the light. As he gazed at it, the glittering lights in his eyes were no less intense than the lights in the jewel. Rapacity, greed, avarice, lust for money and for power, all these things were naked in his eyes. A second later he was calm again. He handed the stone

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to Mac.

"Go find out if this thing is any good," he ordered. "You know where to go. And don't let any grass grow under your feet."

Mac took the stone, climbed into the car we had come in, backed out of the garage, the other thug opening and closing the doors for him. Joe smiled suavely at us. "We'll have to wait a while. Might as well sit down and make yourself comfortable."

He climbed behind the wheel of the remaining car, lit a cigarette. Hinkle and I squatted down with our backs against the wall. Arken, looking like a bug that has been partly stepped on and has only enough strength left to wiggle, glanced at Hinkle and me.

"Sorry," he said, spreading his hands in an apologetic gesture. "Sorry I haf caused you so much trouble. It would have been better if I had stayed away."

"Can you make anything you want to make in that machine?" I questioned.

"Almost anys'ing," he answered. "Some s'ings I cannot duplicate, but most s'ings, all I need is the original."

"Supposing the object you are trying to duplicate is black and light doesn't pass through it?" I asked. "How can you duplicate something like that?"

"De light you see, it does not matter. It is joost light. It is de light you cannot see dat does de vork. And de inwisible light vill pass through almost anys'ing."

The little man certainly seemed to know his optics. He squatted down beside us, sadly contemplated the toes of his shoes. From behind the wheel of the car, Joe watched us in silence. His remaining assistant had taken up a position at the doors of the garage.

"It all depends on whether or not that diamond turns out to be good," I said.

"And if it is good?" Hinkle whispered.

"Then you and I had better start saying our prayers," I answered.

If the diamond was good, if a jeweler would accept it as genuine—and unquestionably Mac had taken it to a jeweler or to a fence specializing in stolen gems—then the machine Arken had in his box was worth as many millions of dollars as he cared to ask for it.

I SAT on my haunches and thought bitter thoughts that I didn't like. The machine made diamonds. That made it valuable all right but actually diamonds are nothing more than pretty rocks. The really valuable things on earth, like beefsteak, supposing it could reproduce them? Could it duplicate a piece of coal, a strip of woolen cloth?

Diamonds are valuable but steak and coal and woolen cloth are vital.

If Arken's machine could duplicate these things, then there would be steak for all of us, coal to heat our homes, woolen clothes to keep us warm.

The history of the human race has been the record of the fight of mankind to secure an adequate supply of food and shelter. There never has been enough of these commodities to go around. There have always been millions of people who didn't have enough to eat or enough clothes to keep them warm. Bitter wars have been fought through all history to gain a supply of these essential commodities.

Only now, with Arken's machine, with Arken's pitcher that never went dry, everybody would have enough—

I thought these thoughts until I couldn't stand thinking them any longer, then I got up and spoke to Joe.

"This is too big for you to take by force," I told him. "This is too important, for all of us, for the good of all mankind, for any one person to try to

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grab it off for himself."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him what I meant. I told him about the beefsteak and the warm clothes and the good shoes. I told him about the slums, where they didn't have enough of those things. I know about the slums. I was born in them. And while I was talking, Arken got up and came over and listened.

"What do you say, Pappy?" Joe questioned. "Can your machine make a beefsteak, can it make a pair of shoes?"

He drew himself up to his full height. The fire that Mac had knocked out of him came back to his eyes.

"Of course it vill make dose t'ings," he answered. "Vy do you t'ink I have vorked all my life on it if it vould not make does t'ings? A diamond, it is pretty, but it is really no good. A beefsteak, it is always good. Dis is vot I haf in my mind, when I go to vork on my inwention. I am brought up in de old country, and we never haf enough to eat, not near enough, and I am hungry all de time, and my bruzzers are hungry, and everybody, he is hungry. So I say to myself, I vill make somes'ing so nobody vill ever be hungry any more."

HE WASN'T a dingy little man in a black suit when he spoke like that. He was a prophet foreseeing the future of the human race, a prophet who had worked all his life to make that future come true.

"Don't try to grab it for yourself, Joe," Arken ended. "It's too big for you, too big for any man. If you steal it, it vill choke you, it vill strangle you. It's somes'ing for all of us, not somes'ing for joost one man."

"It belongs to all of us, Joe," I argued. "It belongs to every man, woman, and child on earth."

"Thanks," Joe said. "You have helped me. I might have missed a bet if you hadn't pointed out all the possibilities to me."

"You mean you—" Arken began.

Avarice glittered in the crook's eyes. "Joe never lets go, Pappy. When he's got his hand on something good, Joe never lets go. If that diamond is good, you can bet that Joe will hang on to your box, Pappy, he'll hang on until hell freezes over."

He frowned. "Mac is taking a hell of a long time getting that stone appraised. He should have been back before this."

I turned and walked away. Arken followed me. His black beard wagged sadly from side to side as he mumbled to himself. Outside a car honked. The thug peeked out, then opened the doors. A car rolled into the garage. Mac was at the wheel.

Joe jumped out of the car he was in, ran to Mac.

"What did he say, Mac?"

His face was aflame with eagerness.

"The fence said he would give four grand for it," Mac answered without getting out of the car.

"Then it's really good?"

"As good as gold. Here it is," Mas answered, reaching into his pocket. The hand that came out of his pocket and up over the edge of the car door held a bulldog revolver. He pointed the muzzle of the gun down and pulled the trigger.

Flame and smoke jutted from the pistol. The heavy explosion was flat inside the walls of the garage. The slug hit Joe in the stomach.

Joe's face showed that he realized, during the split second in which the gun was exploding, what had happened. What Jack London called the law of the club and the fang, the law by which he lived, had overtaken him.

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Arken's prophecy had come true. Joe was a smart crook, a very smart crook, but he had declared himself in one a game where the stakes were too big for him, too big for any man. The stakes had choked him. Because the stakes were so tremendously large, they had lured Mac into gambling for them. There was only one way Mac could do that: eliminate Joe.

Joe staggered backward, fell against the wall.

Mac, his heavy face alive with satisfied sadism, gloatingly watched him fall. Then he stepped out of the car.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled. "I got the big fellow!"

THE door of the garage was kicked open. Mac had taken so long to get the diamond appraised because he was getting together a strongarm squad of his own. The squad was outside.

Joe's man, who had remained loyal, shot the first man who came through the door. A split second later somebody outside the garage let go with a tommy-gun. Slugs moving a thousand miles an hour whammed, whistled, tore their way through the garage.

"Arken! Hinkle! Get under the car!" I heard someone shout. Only later did I realize that I was doing the shouting.

Hinkle was already on his feet, diving for the protection of the nearest car. I went right behind him, hitting the concrete floor and rolling. As I dove toward the automobile, I caught a glimpse of Joe, pulling himself to a sitting position against the wall. With his left hand holding his stomach, he used his right hand to pull a gun out of his pocket. He emptied the pistol into Mac.

The law of the club and the fang is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. The sadism on Mac's face turned to horrified pain. He shot at Joe, and shot again, and was falling as he shot. Joe's body jumped as the heavy bullets hit him.

The tommy-gun let go again. By this time I was under the car. I looked around for Arken. I didn't see him.

"The damned fool!" I heard Hinkle groan.

Arken hadn't followed us. The box containing his machine was sitting on a workbench against the wall. Oblivious of the bullets whamming through the garage, he was frantically digging around inside the box.

"Arken! Get under here!" I yelled.

The guns were momentarily quiet. He heard my yell, turned a white face in my direction. The black beard wagged furiously.

"I can't!" he screamed, pointing to the box.

A bullet had gone into the box. Out of the hole the bullet had left, a black liquid was oozing. The matrix.

"What the hell difference does that make? Let it spill—"

That was as far as I got. Little eyes of blinding fire had begun to appear around the edge of the hole the bullet had left. A drop of the matrix ran down the edge of the box. A tongue of fire followed it. The matrix oozed out on to the wooden workbench. Smoke puffed up, followed by fire. Almost instantly fire and smoke had appeared on the under side of the two inch boards that made the bench.

The matrix had eaten through two inches of wood. It was still eating. A drop fell to the floor. The concrete sizzled like a piece of red-hot iron that has been suddenly plunged into cold water.

Arken had always handled that matrix with extreme care. He had kept it in a bottle made of some unusual kind of inert glass. The receptacle into

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which he poured it had been made of the same material. He had used glass tongs to remove the hundred dollar bill and the diamond from the receptacle.

Whatever that matrix was, it was hot stuff. Arken knew it was hot stuff, and had handled it accordingly. Now a slug had smashed the bottle that held it and it was coming into contact with ordinary materials, the wooden box, the wooden boards on the workbench, the concrete of the floor.

ARKEN was frantically trying to stop it from running out of the box. He stuffed rags into the hole. The matrix ate the rags. There was a piece of broken glass lying on the bench. The glass had come out of the windshield of a wrecked car. Arken grabbed the glass, held it over the hole.

It was not the right kind of glass. The matrix ate through it too.

Before he could try anything else, the whole box exploded, puffing outward and upward with a soft thud. The light that blazed up was brighter than the sun. All the little pin-points of brilliant light that had been visible in the black liquid exploded at the same time. The blazing brilliance was a flaming spray that covered Arken.

I was blind, blind. I couldn't see. But I could hear someone screaming. Arken screaming.

Blind as I was, I tried to crawl out from under the car. Somebody pulled me in the other direction. That somebody was Hinkle and he saved my life. Caught in the blazing brilliance of the matrix, I couldn't have helped Arken. He was beyond help.

The sword of the law of the club and the fang is a vicious weapon, striking the innocent as well as the guilty. Arken was a flaming torch. The workbench, the walls of the garage, the concrete floor were burning with hotter flames than ever came from a welding torch.

Hinkle pulled me out the other side of the car. The automobile had saved our lives, by protecting us from the spray of exploding matrix, but the car was burning over us as we crawled out from under it, crawled out through the open door of the garage.

The man who had remained loyal to Joe, the unseen maniac with the tommy-gun, both were already gone. Smoke from the garage was puffing a thousand feet into the air. Far away the sirens of racing fire engines were sounding. The sirens got closer and closer.

THIS was one blaze the firemen didn't put out right away. It seemed to be fed by some central core of atomic heat that resisted extinguishing. The whole garage was completely burned to the ground before the fire was out.

They didn't find charred bodies in the wreckage, they didn't even find bones. They found the ashes of bones, ashes of Joe, ashes of Mac. They didn't find any ashes of a little black bearded, bald-headed man. Around the workbench where the box had stood they found a hole in the ground, a hole about forty feet deep and twenty foot in diameter.

Somewhere down at the bottom of that hole the matrix had finally used up the last of its energy.

Hinkle and I told our story. We told it as being kidnapped by a gang of counterfeiters whom we had detected. We didn't mention Arken or his machine. We have jobs we want to keep. If we had tried to tell the police about Arken, they would have thought we were as crazy as loons and the directors of the bank would have thought we were not proper employees for such an institution. If Hinkle cried a little, if I wiped tears out of my eyes, as we told

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our stories the police merely thought we were so glad to get away alive that we were crying. They didn't know we were thinking about Arken, about that little bald-headed man. The cops didn't much like the looks of that hole in the ground but Hinkle and I stuck to our stories. We were good citizens of the big town across the river and I could pull political wires. We got our pictures in the paper. In a few days the story was forgotten.

What was Arken's machine, how did it work? I don't know. My guess is that invisible radiations from the strange bulb in the top of the box passed through the articles he was duplicating and recreated them within the matrix. The secret of the matrix I don't know and never will know.

WORKING secretly, Hinkle and I traced Arken. He had been born in Germany and had come to this country at the age of sixteen. He was a professional photographer and he had a tiny shop on the north side. We saw samples of the photographs he had taken. They were works of art.

We also examined the basement of the little two-flat where he had lived. It was crammed and jammed with different kinds of cameras, lenses, developing equipment. Photography had been his profession and his hobby. Day and night he had worked at it. But nowhere in that basement was there a supply of the black liquid he had called the matrix.

We talked to the kids who lived around the neighborhood. Childless himself, Arken had seemingly adopted every kid for his own. The kids mourned when he didn't come back. He had given them balls, he had given them shoes, he had given them thick steak sandwiches, all things that kids in this neighborhood don't often see. Hinkle and I have a theory about the origin of these balls and the other good things that Arken had given away so freely. It is a theory we never discuss except when we are alone.

If we are sorry for the kids, we are also sorry for Arken, for the little black bearded, bald-headed man who had tried to make certain that all kids everywhere would always have all the good things they want and need.

Everytime someone shoves a hundred dollar bill into his cage, Hinkle always looks up eagerly. Against all reason and against all knowledge, he hopes that some day one of the bills will be counterfeit and he will look up and see a little black bearded man grinning at him through the bars of his cage. If it is a day that will never come, Hinkle lives for it just the same.

THE END

SIGHT WITHOUT EYES

By R. CLAYTON

THE air was tense with expectancy, as 150 of the nation's most esteemed physicians gathered together to expose the fraud behind the claim of a 12-year old Los Angeles boy. It was 1936. The boy's name was Pat Marquis, and his claim was that he could see without eyes.

As a first test, three eminent eye specialists blindfolded the boy. Then, he was requested to duplicate the gestures made by the doctors. To the amazement of all present, Pat took a book from the shelf and opened it to the page asked for and even read tiny letters engraved on a watch fob. Still the doctors doubted.

Next, they made the blindfold foolproof, by adding dark glasses and a bandage of adhesive tape. But Pat was still able to pass every test the doctors could devise. He acted exactly as if he had normal vision. Under all the precautions, trickery seemed impossible, yet how could it be possible to see without eyes? With no other explanation, the doctors finally admitted that the boy had "super normal sight and cognition." The case goes on record as the first time anyone has ever seen without eyes.

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The old man was a crackpot all right, and he proved it by prophesying the death of his scoffers. The funny thing was, the scoffers died . . .

DICK BAGLEY'S Adam's apple bobbed up and down like a yo-yo. He had the horrible feeling it was going to pop out of his throat and fall right on the editor's desk.

"Get out of here and get me a story," the editor yelled at Dick. That was putting it mildly. Shrieked, would have been the more appropriate term.

Bagley was in the editorial dog-house. He was a feature writer on *The Blade*, Chicago's most widely read morning sheet. For three straight weeks now, he hadn't been able to write about anything more interesting than the weather. So the editor claimed, and more.

"Get this, Bagley," the editor said, in a voice as calm and collected as a tropical storm, "I hired you to do the human interest yarns. We've got society, court, sports and weather reporters. So don't bring in any more stories about cute little society belles

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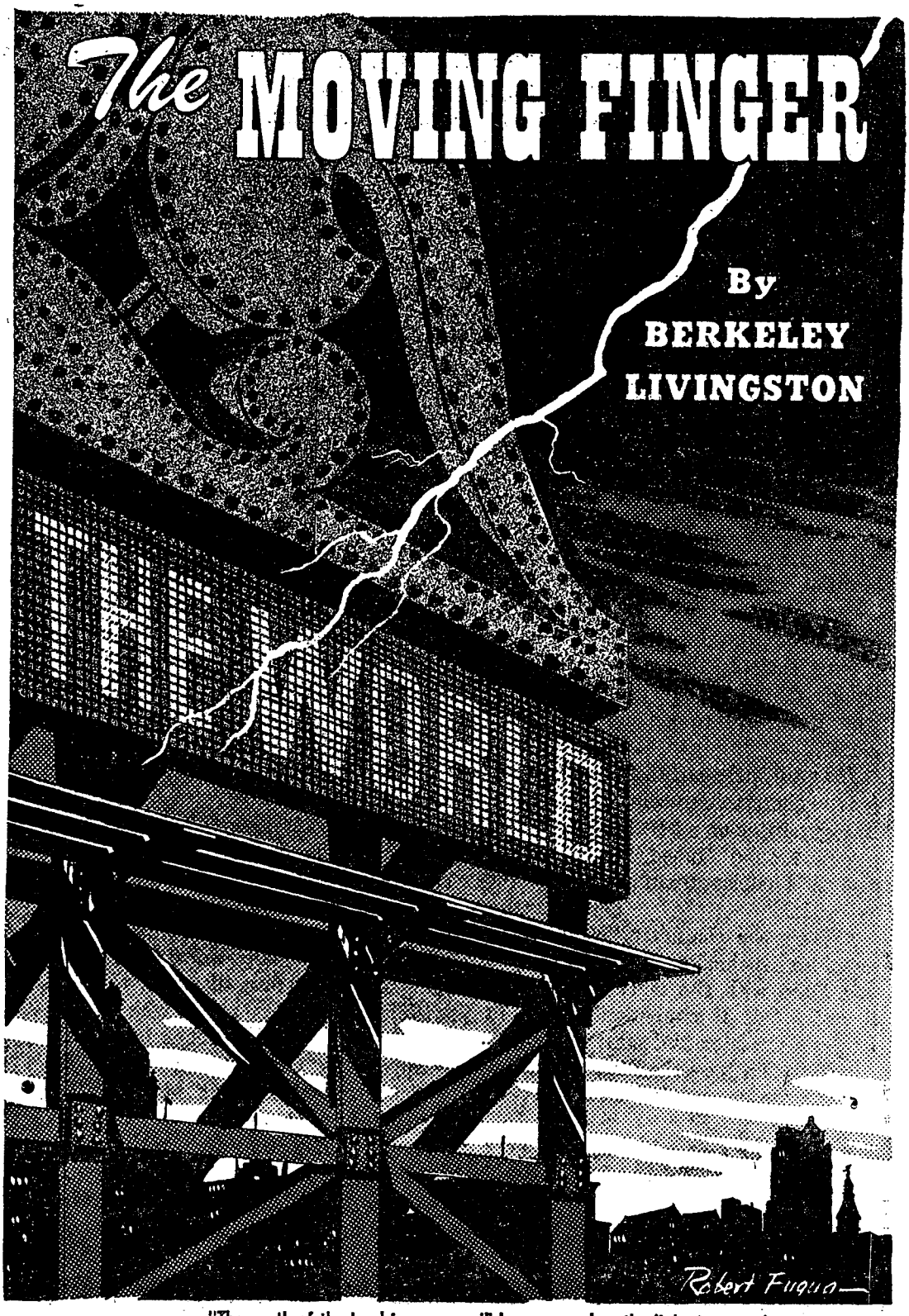

"The wrath of the Lord is upon you!" he screamed as the lightning struck

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who go around offering to marry the champ riveter of a ship yard. Mr. Winchell does a far better job of that. You know what I want of you, so get out of here and get it!"

Bagley got out, but fast. The editor was a hell of a swell guy, telling him *what* to get. If only he had told him *where* to get it.

Why Bagley picked that circular plot of grass, pigeons, benches and bums, which bore the popular name of Looney Circle, he never knew. Somewhere in his subconscious, lay the thought perhaps, that here, among the flotsam and jetsam, the crack-pot and crank, was a story.

It was not listed as Looney Circle in the city directory. There, it bore a name more relevant to its history and location. But through the years it had become a gathering place for the soap-box orators, those who had a grievance against society; those who had a religious message to offer; and last, those who just liked to get up and spout words.

It was a little early in the afternoon for the characters to come around. But Bagley, sitting on a bench, saw a crowd gather around someone who looked like a Shakespearean actor of the "Nineties."

"Who's the character," asked Bagley of his benchmate. A face, unshaven and lined with the marks of hunger, turned a pair of expressionless eyes in Bagley's direction and said:

"Dat's Old Joe—the finger man."

"The finger man? Don't get it. Mind explaining?"

"Sure," the face said, "but it'd be a waste of time. Whyn'cha walk over and bend an ear."

"Ya' got something there, bud," Bagley replied with a smile, "think I will."

On closer inspection, Old Joe proved to be a tall, cadaverous looking individual, with a haggard face and the hottest, most brilliant eyes Bagley had ever seen. They wore the brilliance of insanity—or genius.

HE STOOD on a square, wooden box and his extreme height enabled him to drive whatever message he was delivering, to every person in his audience. That didn't take much. His audience consisted just then, of a dozen people in various stages of somnolence.

"Remember this, my friends," Old Joe ranted, "that the moving finger, having writ, moves on, nor . . ."

". . . Say Joe," a voice, hoarsely raucous, floated in from beyond the crowd, "what's the finger writing today?"

Bagley could not see the voice's owner. He was beyond the farthest edge of the small crowd and hidden from Bagley's view.

Another voice, deep, resonant with power, joined the first:

"Yes Joe, tell us the wonders of the moving finger."

With the first words of the second voice, Bagley began to circle the crowd, to find their owners. At the same time he kept an eye on Old Joe. The old man on the soap box had looked a little mad when Bagley had first laid eyes on him. But now, he looked positively demoniac. His hair, worn long, was flying around his face, like a horse's tail swishing away flies, as he whirled to face the two who had broken in on his harangue.

"Scoffers; Unbelievers!" he screamed in a voice, suddenly high and uncontrolled. "Know that for such as ye, there shall be a judgment. A judgment, which, like Belshazzar's, shall be writ in words of fire."

"That's telling 'em Joe," a third voice joined the others. "Fiery words. That oughta burn 'em up."

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A laugh went up from the crowd. But the pun had another effect on the soap box orator, however. It made him speechless with anger. But only for a few seconds. And in those few seconds, Bagley reached the three he was seeking.

They were seated on a bench which gave them a clear view of Old Joe. Bagley sat down beside them and looked at them with interest.

It was obvious from their dress that none of them were here from necessity. The evident relish, with which they were interrupting the old man made Bagley think it wasn't the first time this had occurred. And Old Joe merely played in their hands when he became angry.

He had drawn himself up to his full height. He looked at the three on the bench; then pointing dramatically with an extended hand, said in a voice pregnant with prophetic doom:

"Aye, in words of fire, were they writ. 'Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting.' So shall ye remember Daniel's judgment when death comes to seek ye. For each of ye . . . " here, his hand pointed to each of them in succession," . . . shall see the hand writing on the wall before ye die. And the words *will be writ in letters of fire.*"

THE words were greeted with laughter by the three. This was what they and the crowd had evidently been waiting for. Shouts went up:

"Dat's puttin' the finger on 'em, Joe."

"Show 'em the way to hell, Joe."

And the three men on the bench were doubled up with laughter. Even Bagley found himself laughing, for Old Joe, after his sudden dramatic denunciation had put both hands on his hips, looked over to them and spat out a single word:

"Phooie!!"

The change from the theatrical manner to the human one was so amusing, Bagley had to laugh.

And Old Joe, as though realizing the futility of carrying on in the face of his tormentors, got down from the box and stalked away.

The shortest and thinnest of the three wiped away the tears, which laughter had brought to his eyes, and said:

"That guy gives me the biggest kick of all the nuts around here."

"Yeah? Why?" Bagley asked. Not that the other had addressed his remark to him. But because Bagley wanted to hear more of Old Joe.

"Well," the other replied, "because all the others around here talk with a tongue in cheek, so to speak, but not Old Joe. His message never changes. First the moving finger, then Belshazzar's feast, then . . ."

". . . We give him a little ribbing," broke in the one with the hoarse voice. "And then comes judgment. We see the fiery letters and die."

"I see," Bagley said. His eyes were thoughtful. Already a story was forming in his mind. He went on:

"Why the theatrical get up? Why does he wear his hair that way? And his clothes. They look like the kind a country preacher wore way back in the eighteen nineties. And I'll swear he was wearing eye shadow to make his eyes look darker."

"You're very observant," the third man said. Bagley recognized his voice. It was the resonant and purposeful voice of a dominant character.

"But tell us this. Why the interest in this charlatan?"

"I'm a reporter for *The Blade*. Do human interest stuff. And I can see story possibilities in the old duck, if I had a little background," Bagley re-

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plied with a smile.

THE other got up and stood in front of Bagley, on hearing that. The other two moved closer to the reporter as the one standing began to talk:

"Who knows what he or any of the others, who get up to talk, have been. Most of them are frauds, with shills passing the hat for contributions, after they're through. Old Joe is a little different. He has his one quotation from Omar Khayyam and dream interpretation of Daniel's, the one which goes, 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.'"

He paused reflectively for a moment, then went on:

"Where he gets his money or how he lives, no one knows."

Bagley rubbed his chin with caressing fingers and asked:

"How come you guys rib the old geezer that way?"

The other smiled at Bagley's question.

"By the way," he said, "let us introduce ourselves. I'm Thaddeus Wilson. The thin fellow is Ed Carney and the other is Tom Jones."

Bagley shook hands all around; then Wilson continued:

"It all started out as a joke. Tom and Ed are regular visitors to the circle. I'm a comparative newcomer. Well, Bagley, I'm the sort of man, who, when he hears anything which goes against the grain of reasoning, wants to argue about it. Tom and Ed are the same kind of men as I. And very often some of these screwballs who get up to talk have a hell of a good argument to give. And since it's sort of an open discussion club, we have a swell time."

"You mean *you* have, don't you Mr. Wilson?" Bagley asked, smiling.

Wilson looked hard at Bagley, then smiled also.

"I see you know who I am. Well let me say that I have far more fun here than at my clubs. Besides, my doctor prescribed fresh air and something to take my mind from business.

"This serves both purposes. Now as to why we kid Old Joe so much. He's the only one who can't take it. The others not only can take it. They can give as well as take."

Bagley sat there a few minutes longer, then excusing himself, got up and left. He didn't listen to the other speakers, who had begun to gather, but headed directly for *The Blade*.

"AND so three men: Thaddeus Wilson, Ed Carney, and Tom Jones were weighed in the balance and found wanting. Found wanting by a man who, even though he stood there on a soap box in a little park known for its collection of lunatic spellbinders, did not seem as the rest. No; Old Joe, standing their pronouncing his words of doom, was in that moment, a fanatic imbued with a prophetic power. Will his judgment come to pass? Will those three men who scoffed, die as he prophecied?"

Sandra Lee's pleasant voice was a little breathless as she finished reading.

Dick Bagley looked very pleased with himself, sitting in the easy chair of her apartment. She sat on the arm of the chair, beside him. On her lap was the first morning edition of that day's *Blade*.

"That's a darn good story, honey," she said.

Bagley laughed aloud.

"Well, that makes it practically unanimous. The editor liked it, you like it and of course, I like it," he said, his voice amusingly smug.

She pinched his nose, as a reminder that a complacent Bagley was the least desirable of all men, then said:

"But did you really mean that about

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this Old Joe being a prophet of doom?"

"No. But it makes good reading. And, as the editor said last night, 'the public'll lap it up.' "

"I don't know about the public, Dick," she said thoughtfully, "but I had the strangest feeling while reading the story. As though it was all so real and will happen just as he prophesied."

"Sandy, my girl," Bagley said, as he got up from the chair, "you have just paid me a very great compliment. And to show my appreciation of it, I'm going to dispel this curtain of witchery I have created, and take you to dinner and a movie."

THE night was so pleasant, they decided on a walk after leaving the movie.

"Let's walk down Michigan Ave.," she suggested.

That was all right with Bagley. He would have walked to the moon if she asked him to.

They were approaching Randolph Street, where it goes east past Michigan to the outer drive, when Sandra pointed to the huge electric sign on the northwest intersection and said:

"I never could understand the reason for that. I don't see how they can get a return on the money they spent for it."

Bagley looked up at the huge affair, ablaze with various colored bulbs and read aloud:

" 'At The Bend Of The Drive, The World's Largest Sign. Drink Old Joel's Bourbon.' Yep that's what it says, the world's largest and brightest sign. There must be an awful lot of whiskey being drunk to make that kind of advertising bring a return."

They had been walking on the east side of Michigan Ave. and so had a clear view of what happened a few seconds later.

Two cars, in different traffic lanes, approached Michigan Ave. The driver on the outside lane in trying to make the turn north on Michigan cut in front of the other car. And before the other could brake or swerve out of the way, they had locked fenders, with disastrous results.

The car, which had been trying to make the turn, was hurled up against the curbing. So hard had been the collision, that it teetered back and forth for a second, then with a grinding scream of ripped metal it turned over spewing flaming gasoline all over the sidewalk.

Sandra screamed once, then clamped a hand over her mouth. But Bagley hadn't even heard her. He was tearing across the street to the scene of the accident. So was the traffic cop on the corner and a dozen others, who were nearby.

But it was already too late. For that which Bagley had seen and Sandra hadn't, was the man who had been standing at the curb where the accident happened. He had been deluged by the flaming gasoline.

Bagley had torn off the sport jacket he was wearing and had thrown it over the flaming, writhing, screaming figure, but it was too late. He had inhaled the flames, which had so suddenly enveloped him. When Bagley removed the smoking wreck of a sport jacket, he saw the man was dead. And he saw who it was. Ed Carney. The little thin man who had scoffed at Old Joe and for whom Old Joe had prophecied a death, "writ in letters of fire."

THE traffic cop had pulled the driver from the overturned car. Already the first piece of fire apparatus had arrived. Bagley walked up to the policeman and the shaking figure he was holding up and after showing his press

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card, said:

"What the hell were you trying to do? Commit suicide?"

"But listen—I saw—" the driver began hysterically. Bagley slapped him hard. The cop nodded approvingly. The slap did the trick. When they asked him again how the accident happened, he was coherent in his answer. But it didn't make sense. For what he said was:

"I started to brake my car and let the other guy go past so I could make a turn, when I happened to look up at the big sign. I thought I was seeing things: All the lights in the thing were out except a few. And those read—*the end of—*"

"The end of what," demanded Bagley.

"That's all. Just, the end of," was the bewildered and bewildering reply.

And that was his story. Nor did the threats of the policeman or the further questioning of Bagley make him change it in the least.

Sandra took one look at the subdued and worried reporter and knew something was wrong.

"What's the matter, Dick?"

He told her about Carney and also what the driver had said about the sign. They both looked up at it again. There it blazed and flashed above them. Nor was there a single bulb which failed to light.

Bagley noticed the little shed-like affair on the roof of the building on which the sign was built.

"There's only one way to find out how true the driver's story is. I'm going up to that shed on top. That's where the electrician for the sign has his place," Bagley told the girl.

The electrician proved to be rather young, and very much interested in his work. When Bagley asked about the sign going dark in any part, he shrugged.

"Well, it's possible but not on nights like this."

"Why not on nights like this?"

"Because," the electrician replied, "the only time I've ever known any number of bulbs to go out has been on stormy nights or nights where there is a high wind. On a clear night such as this, I've never known more than forty of the bulbs to go dark. And there are eighty-two thousand bulbs in this sign."

"And you're sure no part of the sign went dark?"

"Impossible. Do you see that catwalk up there?" the electrician pointed to a steel ladder-like affair which was strung across the face of the sign.

Bagley nodded his head.

"Well," the electrician went on, "it's my duty to go up on that walk four times a night. My last inspection took place an hour ago. And you can see for yourself that everything is all right."

WHEN Bagley returned again to Sandra, he said:

"Come on, honey. Let's get to a a drug store. I want to call somebody. And then I'll take you home."

"A story?" she asked.

"Unh huh," he grunted softly.

The telephone directory told him that Thaddeus Wilson lived in the exclusive South Shore district.

Wilson had a butler or servant, who had seen too many movies with English butlers. His accent was so strong, Bagley found it difficult to understand.

"Is Mr. Wilson in," Bagley asked.

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Tell him Bagley of *The Blade* is calling."

Bagley waited for a couple of minutes, then Wilson came to the phone. He sounded impatient, as he said:

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"Hello, Bagley. I'm sorry that I can't give you much of my time since I'm entertaining some guests. So if you'll make it short, I'll appreciate it."

"Sure, Mr. Wilson," Bagley drawled. "I just wanted to tell you that Ed Carney was killed tonight."

"WHAT!!"

"Yep. And there were letters of fire there. Just as Old Joe said there'd be."

"Bagley, you're mad. That's impossible!"

"That's right Wilson. It's impossible. And that's what I'm going to write in my next feature. The amazing coincidence of the letters of fire and Ed Carney's death."

"Bagley, you can't print that. It's too sensational, too incredible."

"Don't forget, Wilson, in the morning's *Blade*. Read it!" the reporter said, hanging up.

Sensational was too mild a word for Bagley's story. From the moment the paper hit the stands, the newspaper's telephone switchboard had a record day. And all who called asked the same questions.

"Was the story true and was Old Joe really a prophet?"

Bagley sat in the editor's office. From the smile on the editor's face, as he read the cut-out feature on the desk before him, it was evident that Bagley was no longer in the dog-house.

"Bagley," the editor said, looking up, "this is the best thing you've ever done. By far. You've got people talking, asking whether Jones or Wilson will die the same way. Keep that interest at white heat. Remember the ending of your story," the editor began to read again, this time aloud, " 'Except for those three words, *the end of*, the rest of the sign was dark. The driver swore to that. No one else saw the sign go dark. Perhaps the driver is subject to hallucinations. Perhaps it was just a horrible coincidence that Ed Carney was at the curb, when the accident happened. Perhaps it is an excessive use of our imagination to say that that huge electric sign foretold Carney's death. Of that we know—nothing. But this we do know. Carney died, as Old Joe said he would. Whether the Old Man of Looney Circle is a prophet, reincarnated to play his role in modern times, or a Charlatan giving way to his senile anger, remains to be seen. One died, because he scoffed; the other two—' "

The editor finished reading, his voice satisfied.

"Now listen, Bagley," he directed, "get out there to Looney Circle and interview the old nut. Check on Jones and Wilson. Follow them about if you have to. Nothing will happen of course, but you have enough material there for another two weeks."

BAGLEY stared in disbelief, when he arrived at the Circle. He didn't know until then what a furor his story had created. The crowd was so thick, the police captain of that district had had to place a half dozen policemen there to maintain order.

Bagley didn't need to ask where Old Joe was. Where the largest crowd was gathered, he could see Joe's long white hair swirling about his emaciated face. And even from where he stood, Bagley could almost feel the fanatic gleam of the old man's brilliant eyes.

Bagley was in luck. The old man had evidently just arrived. And from his first words, it was also evident he read the newspapers, particularly *The Blade*.

If nothing else, the old man was an actor. He spoke in a slow measured strain:

" 'The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on.' So it was writ-

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ten. But know this also. That what the moving finger writes will be done in letters of fire. There shall be none of ye here who shall not be weighed in the balances. And many shall be found wanting."

Bagley almost laughed aloud, when he saw the effect the words created on the crowd. Awe was in every face, and fear also. It was as though they all had come to cast stones and with his first words, the old man had stopped them cold.

"The time has come," Old Joe was saying now, "when the unbelievers of this world, the scoffers and idolators shall know of their end. Aye; in letters of fire, writ high against the sky, shall the judgment be known. As I have prophesied for three, so, soon shall I prophesy for all."

Bagley whistled softly to himself. The old man had left his box. Slowly, the tall, white haired figure made its way through the silent crowd. And as Bagley watched Old Joe walk through one of the gates, he felt a thrill, a compound of fear and horror, take hold of him. The strange thought struck him that he might be helping to create a Frankenstein monster.

But at sight of a familiar figure seated on a bench, his thoughts took a different turn.

It was Thaddeus Wilson.

Wilson, silent and very much lost in retrospect, did not see Bagley approach. Just as the reporter was about to sit beside him, he heard him whisper:

"This is ridiculous. That old fake up there has ranted and raved so long he's become mad."

"Why?" Bagley whispered softly.

Wilson did not seem to hear, for he didn't turn to answer. Yet his next words were an answer to the reporter's question.

"Because Ed Carney died. And he believes he foretold his death. And mine. And Tom Jones'."

HIS body shook in silent mirth. But the face that turned to Bagley had lines of worry; and of a new born fear, which had not been there the day before.

"Wilson, you're not afraid, are you?"

Wilson's lips, usually full, tightened to a thin pale line. His chin lifted to a stubborn, hard mound of flesh, as he looked the reporter full in the face.

"I was — a little — Bagley, until just now. Now I can see how silly I was. Your article did things for the old man. You gave him a certain spurious plausibility. And so today, he had an audience, an audience, which, because of the advertising you'd given him, helped him in playing his little role of prophet, as he never played it before."

Bagley surveyed the well dressed, heavy set figure of Wilson, with respect.

The reporter said: "What do you intend to do about it?"

"Go about my affairs, precisely as I have always done."

"And what about Jones?" Bagley asked.

"I talked to Tom this morning. He was very sorry to hear of Ed Carney's death, but pooh-poohed the business of 'the fingers of fire,' " Wilson replied.

They sat silent for a few minutes, then Wilson suddenly said:

"Bagley, I've a proposition for you, if you're interested."

"Shoot, I'm interested."

"How would you like to spend the rest of the afternoon with me? Then you can write of this afternoon, as being spent with one of the condemned men, if you want to call it that."

Bagley had his answer out before Wilson stopped talking.

"Thanks, Mr. Wilson. I'll accept your offer.

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"O. K., then, let's go. I have my car in a garage near here. We'll drive."

WILSON'S car proved to be the kind which one generally associates with movie stars and jockeys. It was so long, that Bagley couldn't imagine Wilson making a U turn in the middle of the street.

But as Wilson explained:

"Some of my interests are out of town. And, since I don't like trains and there is no plane service to the towns where my factories are located, I use this car. When I give it the gun, you'll think you're flying."

They were passing through one of the suburbs to the south of Chicago, when Wilson asked:

"What is the date, today?"

"Well, if you didn't know," Bagley replied, "it's the Fourth of July. If it isn't then all those kids we saw shooting off those fireworks, were just celebrating Chinese New Year."

"That's what I thought. We'll have to stop at one of these roadside displays and pick up some fireworks for my nephew," Wilson said.

Shortly after, they passed one which seemed to be doing business. A large sign bore the message: "Fireworks at wholesale prices. Last day, last chance. Closing out and up."

It was a much larger stand than any they had seen before. A half dozen clerks were busily taking care of quite a number of customers. The two men got out of the car and walked over to the stand.

Wilson purchased whatever he thought would please his nephew and was waiting for his change from the clerk, when the warning shout came:

"Watch out for those pin-wheels!"

Everyone's eyes turned in the direction of the warning voice. Bagley saw that a woman, who had been leaning against a part of the stand which held some loose pin-wheels, had accidently set one off. The cigarette dangling between her fingers had done the trick.

The pin-wheel, emitting sparks, had gone skipping over the counter and had fallen into a barrel marked, "Roman Candles." There was a sudden, vivid flash of flame and dozens of varicolored balls of fire flew out in all directions. In a few seconds the stand and the stock in it, was an exploding, flaming holocaust.

Then above the sound of crackling fire-works, there came the hysterical cry of a woman.

"Where's little Tommy?"

And someone replied, in a voice as hysterical as the woman's:

"He was behind the counter! Quick, someone. Anyone! Get him out!"

And the someone, anyone, who leaped over the burning counter, to find the lost Tommy, was Wilson. It was all over in a few seconds. Wilson, the little boy under one arm, appeared through the smoke and flame and vaulted over the counter again, to safety. Bagley saw, that but for a few scorched spots on his clothes, the fire had not touched Wilson at all.

When the grateful mother had finished thanking him, and the admiring crowd had done with patting him, Wilson and Bagley walked back to the car.

"Ya' know," Bagley remarked, "when I saw you go over that counter, I looked all around to see if there were any letters of fire. Because, to tell you the truth, I didn't think you'd come out of that mess, alive."

"I suppose that proves one thing to you, Bagley," Wilson said, smiling.

THE reporter seated himself in the car and asked:

"Proves what?"

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"Why, that Old Joe's prophecies are so much hooey."

"That might be," Bagley said, "but we still have another precinct to hear from. Jones. Besides, Old Joe specifically mentioned 'the letters of fire,' in connection with your demise."

"I'm afraid we'll have to wait too long a time to see those appear. Old Joe never did say just when those fiery letters would show up," Wilson said quizzically.

"They showed up mighty soon, for Carney," Bagley reminded the other.

"Sorry, Bagley, but I'm convinced that a series of coincidental circumstances created a plot situation, which your mind has built into a real possibility. I just can't believe it."

"Frankly, Mr. Wilson," Bagley said as they started off again, "I'm just a reporter, looking for a story. I got it when I heard three men kidding a broken old actor."

"Broken down actor?" Wilson interrupted.

"Yes. That's what Old Joe was. A ham actor playing Shakesperean roles. We've got pictures of him in our morgue. I thought I recognized him and when I got back to the paper I went to the trouble of looking him up. I also discovered other facts. One, in particular, should prove of interest. The old guy worked in Hollywood a few years ago. In the days when those religious pictures were the thing. He took the part of Daniel in a picture, then Hollywood washed its hands of him, because he began to think he was really Daniel come to life again."

Wilson nodded thoughtfully, and said:

"So that's it. He is really insane. The make-believe of movies became reality for him. He thinks he is Daniel and so must use Daniel's words."

They drove along in silence until they reached the little town where one of Wilson's factories was located. Wilson transacted his business in an hour, while Bagley had coffee in the town's only restaurant.

As they started off again, Wilson, usually effusive, said quietly:

"I have the damndest, most irritating feeling of suspense. Probably the reaction setting in from the heroics of the fire. Still, I can't seem to get rid of it."

Bagley looked at him questioningly, then asked, as though the thought had just occurred to him:

"I wonder where Tom Jones is?"

"Well, I don't know where he is right now. But he's going to a lecture at Orchestra Hall tonight," Wilson answered.

"Maybe I'd of had better luck following him around," Bagley said, smiling.

AS THEY stopped off at several more places, the reporter noticed that Wilson was becoming more and more perturbed about something.

Finally whatever was bothering the man could no longer be held back. He said:

"It's not suspense I'm feeling. It's more of a feeling of doom—a doom which is hanging over my head and which is inevitable."

"Now take it easy," Bagley said warningly, "I thought we settled the problems of Old Joe for once and for all."

"Yes, we've talked it over, all right," Wilson replied, "but that feeling persists. So I'm going to drive you back to town. It's certain that I can't discuss business with anyone the way I feel."

It was about ten o'clock, when they reached Wilson's home on the South Shore.

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Bagley decided to take an L train into the loop. His mind went over the whole of the two days which had passed.

"Nuts!" he exclaimed, "I knew I meant to ask Wilson several things. I shouldn't have gotten sidetracked that way. But then again, if I'd have asked him such questions as, what is the real reason for Old Joe choosing you three for his prophecy, or what have any of you had to do with the old guy in the past to make him feel so vindictive, Wilson would have thought I was crazy. Because with one breath I tell him the old man is a faker, and prove it. Then with the next breath. I show belief in the whole silly business."

As the train Bagley was on, pulled into the first downtown stop, he thought he recognized one of the people waiting there to board it. It was only a momentary feeling and soon passed. When he got off the train at Randolph Street, he walked over to the opened up part of the wall which looked over the Drive. He could see the huge sign on Michigan Avenue flashing its message into the night.

The huge, illuminated hand, with its pointing finger directed the onlookers' gaze toward the advertising which read, "At The Bend Of The Drive, The World's Largest Sign. Drink Old Joel's Bourbon."

Bagley watched the sign blink its thousands of lights for a few seconds, then turned to leave. Why he turned back again for another look, he was never able to explain. But what he saw made his eyes pop.

THE lights in the sign had blinked dark as usual. But instead of all the lights flashing on again, only a few did. And those few read: *"the end of,"* Bagley rubbed his eyes hard. What he saw was impossible. As though in verification, when he looked again, the sign showed the full message.

The scream, which split the night, was not imaginary, however. It swung him around, as though it held physical powers. His horrified eyes saw what happened.

A northbound train had come into the station platform. As usual, when a train pulled in, the waiting crowd began to mill and push forward. A contest seems to develop, the prize being an empty seat to whoever enters the train first. Now, however, someone pushed too hard. And a man went hurtling over the platform onto the tracks a few feet below. Bagley saw the body strike on hands and knees and topple forward to fall full across the third rail. A brilliant, crackling, blue flash flamed from under the body. An odor, compounded of scorched human flesh and burned ozone filled the air.

The crowd was horror-stricken. The engineer braked the train down and leaped from the cab onto the tracks. Bagley lost his feeling of revulsion in his desire to be first on the scene, and followed the engineer.

The tremendous shock of the electrocution had frozen the body on the track. It lay there across the third rail, face straining away from the steel rail which had brought death.

Bagley took one look at the blue face with the dead eyes almost popping from their sockets, and the black tongue showing between the swollen parted lips, and felt his stomach sicken. He recognized the horror mask. He remembered seeing it only a few moments before, when his train had pulled into the first Loop station. He remembered seeing it elsewhere before; its distended lips making mockery of an old man on a soap box.

The second judgment had come to

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pass.

Tom Jones had died, when letters of fire were written in the sky. And he, Dick Bagley had seen the writing.

His mind was a tumult of thought, as he climbed back to the platform. Nor did he wait for the repair train to come in and release the body from the clutches of death, which had embraced it.

He made his way through the dense Loop crowds, in a sort of trance. Even the good-natured kidding of the reporting staff on *The Blade,* failed to pierce his reverie. He sat down at his desk and typed out his story, then he got up and left.

THE butler, with the imported accent, answered his ring. He had evidently been awakened by the summons of the bell.

"Yes, sir?" the two words condemned Bagley for breaking the rules of proper calling time.

"Will you tell Mr. Wilson that Bagley is here to see him."

"I don't think Mr. Wilson wants to be disturbed at this hour," the butler replied, his accent growing thicker by the second.

"Listen Arthur Treacher," Bagley said, "If you don't scram out of here and call your boss, your next job will be among the unemployed."

The butler looked his haughtiest—but did as he was bid. Bagley followed him in. His mind was so intent on what he was going to say, that he passed through the several luxuriously appointed rooms without being aware of the evident wealth which Wilson possessed.

The butler asked Bagley to wait in a sitting room. In a few minutes Wilson, attired in a sumptuous, silk dressing robe, made his appearance. He took one look at the drawn, haggard looking face of the reporter and asked:

"Jones?"

"Yeah. Jones. Was shoved off an elevated platform onto the third rail. Before my very eyes." Bagley jerked the words out, as though he was in pain. He went on. "And the driver was right. About the words. Because, tonight, *I saw them.* That damned sign went out except for those three words, 'the end of!' "

"Bagley you're making it all up. I can't believe it," Wilson exclaimed hoarsely.

"No. It happened all right. And that sign has something to do with it. That is the craziest part of the whole thing. Which reminds me. I asked you once before, have any of you ever had anything to do with Old Joe? Not that it makes any difference. But I'd still like to know. And also, who were Ed Carney and Tom Jones."

Wilson sat down. His ruddy face was pale and he suddenly looked old.

"Believe me," he began in a low voice, "to my knowledge, none of us had ever seen the old man before that first day he appeared in the Circle."

He paused, searching back again in his memory for a clue which might solve the strange puzzle. But he could find nothing. In a few seconds he resumed:

"No. I'm sure he was a complete stranger to us. You want to know who Carney and Jones were. Well, Jones, whose full name was Thomas Philander Jones—the name should mean somthing to you—was a professor at one of our colleges here. Carney was a retired merchant. And from what you told me of Old Joe, I can't see any of us having crossed his path before."

WHEN Wilson spoke Jones' full name, Bagley remembered who he

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was. One of the country's most famous historians. Carney, however, was a stranger to him. As for Wilson, Bagley was aware, as was the rest of the newspaper public, of the man's fame. Wilson was a public figure. Capitalist, club man, art lover, and possessed of several idiosyncrasies which had made newspapers before. One of his best known quirks was that of holding public debate with the characters of Looney Circle.

"Well Bagley," Wilson said, "what are you going to print now? Another fulfilled prophecy story? And if you are, where is it going to end?"

"Good guess, Wilson," the reporter answered, "That's how the story is going to run and"—a thought occurred to him which made him whistle, "Holy smoke! That reminds me. I've got to get back to the office. There's something in that story I want to kill. And for the love of God, Wilson, stay put or get a police guard. But whatever you do, stay out of public places."

Bagley left after that. He rode a cab back to *The Blade* offices. The editor was already there, when he arrived. There was a serious, questioning look on the editor's face, as he said:

"Bagley, the story you turned in is a masterpiece. But aren't you taxing the credibility of the public too much? You know. The business of you seeing those words. And too, the suddenly serious vein where you discuss the probability of the other prophesies coming true."

Sweat glistened on Bagley's face. He was in an excited, almost frightened mood.

"Mr. Todd," he gasped, "you haven't put that story to press yet have you?"

"Bagley," Todd exclaimed, "you should know what time this edition hits the presses."

"Too late to pull anything now?"

"Of course. They've probably run a hundred thousand by now. Why? What's wrong?"

"My story," Bagley said hopelessly. "It's got something in there that's going to"——

"——You mean about the old man's judgment in that crowd today?" Todd asked shrewdly.

"Yes."

"Well, I let that run. Your story is going to run, as written. But tell me one thing. Do you seriously believe in all this?"

Bagley's mouth was twitching.

"Yes," he said, "I do. The whole thing is like some crazy dream come true. Where it will end, I don't know." He was visibly shaken when he stopped talking.

The editor's lips were pursed coldly. He folded his hands together on the desk top.

"Now listen here, Bagley, we can't permit that!"

"Mr. Todd," Bagley pleaded, "Please, kill that story. Stop the presses. You must! That old man will run hog wild now. He's going to set that crowd's imagination on fire when he reads the story. And I know he's going to read it."

"Bagley," Todd stopped him. "You are crazy. Stop the presses! H'm, no indeed, but I am going to stop *you!* You're fired! When you've recovered your senses, come back. But not until then. And now, if you don't mind, Bagley, I'm very busy."

He returned to the reading of his clippings, with an air of finality.

BAGLEY walked the short distance to his apartment on the Near North Side and went to bed. But not to sleep. For whatever sleep he had was filled with a nightmarish procession of catastrophies, in which the cen-

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tral character was a wildly fanatic madman, Old Joe. Fire rained from the sky. Floods filled the earth. And always he seemed to meet Wilson, running, trying to escape from his doom. Also, one other thing kept recurring in his dreams. The electric sign; but so immense it seemed to fill the whole sky. And always were the words shown in it, the same. "The End Of." . . .

Bagley awakened to find he was soaked in perspiration. The coverings, sheets and mattress were even wet with sweat. He looked at the small alarm clock on his dresser. The hands told him it was already noon. He dressed with almost frantic haste. He almost ran, in his hurry, to get to Looney Circle. He wanted to get there before Old Joe.

He stopped aghast, a block before the little park. The sidewalks and street itself, were packed with people whose objective was the same as his, Looney Circle. Today, the police captain had ordered out many more than the six patrolman, who had been sufficient the day before.

The press pass, which Bagley still had enabled him to gain a quick admittance through the crowd. But when he arrived at the little plot of grass, which served Old Joe as a podium, he found it unoccupied. Not for long though.

A murmur, hushed almost as quickly as it had come to life, ran through the crowd. The Old Man, dressed as always in the black suit which he affected, was being escorted through the crowd, by a guard of a half dozen blue clad policemen. They formed a sort of guard of honor around him, when he mounted his little box from which he spoke.

The immense throng, which filled the park from end to end, fell silent, as he looked it over a few seconds.

"And so," he began softly, yet in a voice which carried to the farthest reaches of the crowd, "judgment for another of the guilty, came to pass. 'Tis but the beginning. For the time has come—not far off—when all—aye, the whole world—shall hear its doom. There is yet another who must die. Then and not until then, shall my final judgment come to be. Be not impatient. Ye shall know, soon, my friends," he said in a solemn conclusion.

With that, he got off the box; the police formed their cordon about him, and away they went. Bagley found time to marvel at the wonderfully effective simplicity of the old man's theatrical gesture. No long-drawn out harangue. No pulling of people's emotions. Nothing but a simple promise. But a promise which held a threat of doom more real than any which they had imagined.

The third man had to die first, however. Wilson's address had been given in Bagley's story. All that night, and the next, and the next, the street in front and the alley behind the mansion where he lived, was filled with people. And all through those days and nights policemen guarded Wilson.

In the meantime, Bagley's former editor kept the reading public in a fever of speculation. He pulled the best known feature writer on the paper from the articles he was doing and put him to devising sensationally speculative articles on Old Joe and his prophesies. With each passing day the articles became more lurid and sensational. And soon their effect became noticed. Little notices began to appear in all papers. People were committing suicide. And all because of what *The Blade* was printing.

NIGHT and day, Michigan Avenue was crowded with people, who did

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nothing but stare up at the sign. And nothing happened. It was as though a truce, temporary, yet a truce which was needed, had been declared between Old Joe and the gods.

Dick Bagley was one of those who came to stare at the sign, too. Sometimes he brought Sandra Lee along, but usually he came alone.

It was an almost unrecognizable Bagley, however. Deep, purple circles under his eyes attested to the strain he was under. And to the sleepless nights he had spent. For he felt he was to blame for the whole thing. It was he, who had played up the prophesies. It was he, who had brought to the public notice, the character known as Old Joe.

Every day he called Wilson. And every day he could detect a greater strain in Wilson's voice. The man was laboring under terrific tension. The never failing crowds the constant police guards, was almost too much to bear. And too, many religiously superstitious people had begun to make their appearance. Many of these had come to make public prayers for the safekeeping of Wilson's life.

A week passed and nothing happened. On the seventh night Bagley came down to look at the sign. Sandra was with him. They stood looking up at the sign for a few minutes then she said:

"It just doesn't seem possible. That that huge affair spelling out its advertising, can strike such terror in people's breasts. Honey," she said reflectively, "I thought the Old Joel Bourbon people were asked to stop their use of the sign."

Bagley sighed sorrowfully at the memory of what had happened. He had been the instigator of a public letter addressed to the distillers, asking them to keep the sign dark. But the business men, who owned the product, had made fun of the letter. Besides, the articles had brought them much free publicity and a great influx of added business. No, the sign would remain alight, as far as they were concerned.

Bagley told her what had happened. He also gave his opinion of those people in no uncertain terms. They were standing so, talking over the probabilities of what would happen should the sign again go through its antics, when the bulbs began to flash on and off.

A wail arose from the crowd. Sandra gripped Bagley's arm so tightly it hurt. Above the bulbs in the sign began to go dark until only a few remained alight.

The crowd's exhortation to "look at the sign," was unnecessary. Bagley's eyes were unwaveringly riveted on it. In a few seconds those bulbs which remained alight spelled out their too familiar pattern. And Bagley knew that Wilson had died.

"All right, darling," he said to Sandra. "Let's go. Our vigil is over."

"Where are we going," she asked, as they walked north on Michigan.

"You mean, where am *I* going," he said.

"All right, then. Where are you going."

"To transact a little business deal," he replied.

HE LEFT her off at her place and walked over to his apartment. From one of the drawers of his dresser he pulled an envelope. He didn't bother looking inside. He knew what it contained. Three thousand dollars, in bills. And from another drawer he took out a blue steel revolver. Bagley had come to a decision. Old Joe had to be stopped. In his pockets were the only two means he knew of.

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And that was Bagley's destination. Old Joe lived in one of those red-brick, run-down houses with a short stoop and worn out, worried looking fronts, which line north Wabash, from the river to Chicago Avenue.

Although it was after midnight, Bagley hoped to catch the old man in. An old woman, who answered his ring, was in her glory when he told her for whom he'd come.

"Now isn't that wonderful!" she said with a coy simper, "that great man living here all this time and I'd never known it."

"Yes, lady," Bagley said. He still held the press card, so she could not help but see it constantly. "And I'm here for a personal interview. By the way, what is your name? I know the readers of our paper would be interested in your opinion of Old Joe."

Her opinion took fifteen minutes of telling. Bagley made a great to do of jotting down her ramblings. Then she said:

"I'm sorry, but he isn't in. He hasn't been in for two days now."

He sighed. "Well, can I see his room? Later I'll bring a photographer along and take pictures. Of you and the house."

She might have been wary of letting him up, but when he mentioned the photographers, she invited him in. Old Joe lived up one flight and straight back to the rear of the house. It was a narrow, dark and airless room. The walls were almost completely covered with hand painted mottos and sayings from the bible. Bagley noticed they were hand painted. And almost all were quotations from Daniel.

"May I sit here for a moment?" he asked. "I want to get the spiritual feeling of the room. I'm sure you know what I mean," he added.

"Oh yes," she said. And sat down in another chair.

He sat there busy in thought. So Old Joe hadn't shown up for the last few days. Where was he? Had he known of Wilson's death? And how had Wilson died?

Bagley did not even question that Wilson *had* died. All he was worried about was Old Joe's reactions. He noticed something peculiar about the illustrations and mottos. He became more and more convinced he knew where Old Joe would be found. But it would be useless to look tonight.

He got up then and left. And for the first time in a week he slept soundly. He took a *Blade* from the newspaper stand and read it over his breakfast. The entire front page was devoted to Thaddeus Wilson's life, achievements, and connections with Old Joe.

A single line told of his death. He had committed suicide.

BAGLEY left the restaurant and walked to Looney Circle. The morning's promise was being fulfilled. The sun had come up, a brazen ball in a blue-white sky. Now the afternoon had turned intolerably humid. The horizon was rimmed with a dark border of oily looking clouds. Every movement of his body reminded Bagley of the heat.

If that were possible, the crowd in the park was even larger than any he had seen before. An hour went by—another hour—and Old Joe did not show up. The suspicion which had taken root in Bagley's mind, when he was in the old man's room, was becoming a greater certainty with each passing moment.

Bagley waited another two hours, then left. As he walked along he felt of his pockets to see whether he had the money with him. The gun was

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heavy in the waistband of his trousers.

Even the leaves on the trees in Madison Park drooped in weariness. Bagley felt uncomfortable in the light-weight jacket he wore. But because of the gun concealed, it remained around his shoulders.

Bagley walked from one animal house to another, searching for the old man. The doors of all were closed. They had been closed for several hours now. Already it was getting dark. There was only one place left to go in the entire park. He felt a tingle of horror caress his spine, at the thought. Yet, there and there only, was where Old Joe was. The open lion pit, near the outer drive.

Dusk made grotesque the shadows of vine and tree. Bagley found himself walking on tip toe, as he neared the iron barred pit. He knew it would be empty of any beast. The lions were fed before dark and the inner cages were opened for them.

He leaned against the fence and whispered:

"Daniel. Daniel."

There was no answering sound to his voice.

Again, this time a little louder:

"Daniel. Daniel, it is I!"

A voice from the dimness of the rock strewn pit answered:

"Aye, it is Daniel. Who calls?"

"A disciple, Master. The people await thee."

A white gowned figure came clambering up. Old Joe had taken the last step on his road to madness. He was dressed in a sort of Arab costume, very much like the pictures of Daniel, which hung in his room.

Bagley had been right in his wild guess.

He had seen the black coat, the old man usually affected, flung over a chair in his room. He had speculated on the reason for it. Then, as he saw the many illustrations of Daniel in the lions den, the wild idea that the old man had taken the last steps on the road to a lunatic belief that he was a reincarnated Daniel, was born.

The sight of the fantastically clad figure climbing over the fence, confirmed the belief. Old Joe grabbed him by an arm and said:

"The hour is at hand. I have had a dream. Now I must go to interpret the dream. Where the letters of fire shall show their portent."

"Master," Bagley said, "your disciple shall follow you."

THE two made a strange appearing couple walking down Michigan Avenue. For several blocks before the huge sign, the street was thick with people. It was as though they all had known, with Wilson's death, that Old Joe would appear to make known his last judgment.

A path was made for the two men. Old Joe stood, in a cleared space before the tremendous gathering and began to speak.

But Bagley, for once, was not listening. He had gone to put his plan into action. He mounted to the shack, where he found the electrician.

His knock was answered by the young fellow.

"Yes?" the electrician asked.

"Don't you remember me?" Bagley said, "I'm the reporter who was up here before."

"Oh yes. Of course. Well what can I do for you tonight?"

"What you can do for me is nothing. But what you can do for all those people is everything. Turn the lights off in the sign."

"Turn the lights off? You're nuts," the electrician exclaimed.

"Maybe. But I've got three thou-

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sand dollars with me that says I'm not. And its yours if you'll turn them off."

The young electrician gulped.

"Sorry," he said at last. "No can do. Not even for three thousand."

"Then I'll have to turn it off myself," Bagley said, as he pulled the gun from its hiding place. "Now get out of my way."

The electrician backed away for a few steps. Then almost before Bagley was aware of his intentions, he had leaped forward. But he was a little too slow. The reporter sidestepped and swung the barrel of the gun hard against the side of his head. One blow was enough. The electrician went out cold.

Bagley leaped to the switches lining the wall. The biggest of them was marked, "Main Switch-Sign." The switch points sent out little flickers of blue light when he closed the circuit. And the darkness outside the shack was now complete.

Bagley hadn't noticed the change in the elements. Lightning flickered eerily in the heavens. A wind had risen, almost gale-like in its fury. Bagley leaned over the coping, to stare down on the crowd. The upturned faces showed their wonder. Then someone pointed a finger upward. And Bagley saw where they were pointing. Old Joe had come up.

He stood before the darkened sign and throwing his arms wide, began to yell.

"I am Daniel, come to pass judgment. And this is my judgment—the world and all within it shall perish—so shall it be writ, in letters of fire!"

Bagley's eyes almost leaped from their socket. The sign had lighted up to read, *the end of the world.*

The old man had become absolutely mad. When he read the words in the sign, he began a mad capering dance. The lightning flickered and flamed above them. Thunder sent its mad crashes rolling down the streets. And the wind had become a tornado.

Suddenly, the lights formed a new pattern. New words flashed across it.

"The End Of Old Joe."

And as the words were formed there was a last thunderous report and—the sign began to sway—tremble—then, with a great ripping sound it fell.

To Bagley staring in a horrified stupefaction, Old Joe seemed to greet it with outstretched arms.

ROCKET TO LIMBO

(Concluded from page 77)

on the edge of Mr. Smith's desk, idly swinging her foot so that the whirabees rotated with a soft, musical whirr. "I mean, you're really a genius. That's the second or third couple you've got on the ship, each half of the couple thinking he or she was the only one to want to dispose of the other—! Gosh, it's wonderful."

Mr. Smith (of Smith and Tinkem, disposals) nodded benignly to acknowledge the compliment. He got an emery board out of the drawer in his desk and began to file a fingernail.

"But there's one thing I've always wanted to know," the girl went on. "Where do they go, really? I mean, all that stuff about limbo is all very well for the customers, but what really becomes of them?"

Smith filed industriously away at the fingernail for two or three minutes before he raised his eyebrows a little and answered her with a shrug.

"Tinkem takes care of them—after they get to limbo, of course . . ."

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Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

ARCHIMEDES

ARCHIMEDES, Greek mathematician and inventor who bears one of the most distinguished names among the ancients, was born at Syracuse in Sicily, in 287 B.C. At that time that part of the island was still a colony of Greece, and under the rule of King Hiero II. As for several centuries it had been alternately in the possession of Greece and Phoenecia, it is possible that his ancestry was more or less of a mixture of the two races. His education was obtained at Alexandria, in Egypt, which was then a Greek colony under Ptolemy III, and ranked as the most famous center of learning in the world.

His achievements indicate the possession of a gifted mathematical mind, coupled with the imagination of the natural inventor. He was a brilliant geometer, ranking in his time next to Euclid. He explained the principle of the lever, which, as a mechanical contrivance, had been employed since remote antiquity; but so far as the records go, had not previously been mathematically investigated. Concerning its powers he is supposed to have said: "Give me a place where I can stand, and a fulcrum, and I will move the earth."

Archimedes was also the discoverer—or at least the first known employer—of the principle that "the weights of bodies are proportional to their masses," in which the word mass means "quantity of matter" and not volume. According to the story, Hieron, the king of Syracuse, had ordered a new crown, and had furnished the artificer with a definite weight of gold for its manufacture. When the crown was delivered there was a suspicion that silver or even a base metal had been substituted to some extent for the precious one, and the matter was referred to Archimedes for investigation. Archimedes was puzzled till one day, as he was stepping into a bath and observed the water running over, it occurred to him that the excess of bulk occasioned by the introduction of alloy could be measured by putting the crown and equal weights of gold and of silver separately into a vessel of water, and noting the differences of overflow. He was so overjoyed when this happy thought struck him that in his excitement he ran through the streets to his home entirely naked, shouting "Eureka! I have found it, I have found it."

To Archimedes was due the development of that department of geometry called "Conic Sections," treating of the circle, ellipse, parabola and hyperbola, all of which had of course been recognized before his time, but whose properties had not been mathematically studied. He was a voluminous writer for his day. Of his works that are extant, three are devoted to plane geometry, three to solid geometry, one to arithmetic and three to mechanics. Like all the earlier mathematicians he tried to square the circle, and as the result of his calculations announced that the value of π was somewhere between the figures 3.1408169 and 3.1428571, thus admitting in the end the insolubility of the problem, but indicating closely the ratio between diameter and circumference now employed. On the other hand, he succeeded in demonstrating that the area of a segment of a parabola is two-thirds that of the enclosing parallelogram, which was the first instance on record of the quadrature of a curvilinear surface. In his "Method of Exhaustion" he made an approach to the modern study of the Calculus.

Archimedes died at the capture of Syracuse by Marcellus, 212 B.C. In the general massacre which followed the fall of the city, Archimedes, while engaged in drawing a mathematical figure on the sand, was run through the body by a Roman soldier. No blame attaches to the Roman general, Marcellus, since he had given orders to his men to spare the house and person of the sage, and, in the midst of his triumph he lamented the death of so illustrious a person, directed an honorable burial to be given him, and befriended his surviving relatives. In accordance with the expressed desire of the philosopher, his tomb was marked by a sphere inscribed in a cylinder, the discovery of the relation between the surface and volume of a sphere and its circumscribing cylinder being regarded by him as his most valuable achievement. When Cicero was quaestor in Sicily (75 B.C.), he found the tomb of Archimedes, near the Agrigentine gate, overgrown with thorns and briars. "Thus," says Cicero, "would this most famous and once most learned city of Greece have remained a stranger to the tomb of one of its most ingenious citizens, had it not been discovered by a man of Arpinum."

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There was a whining roar of sound in his ears as the world suddenly went crazy around him

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Happiness is Nowhere

by Chester S. Geier

The world he knew was bitter and filled with unhappiness. But in Jorelle he found peace and serenity and a girl called Lethra . . .

HE KNEW he couldn't keep driving much longer the way he felt. The old fever had really got him this time. His body flamed with it, his head was a balloon buffeted by a storm of pain, the road was a great gray worm that writhed and twisted before his eyes.

But Ross Downing set his lips stubbornly

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and gripped the steering wheel of his maroon roadster tighter in his sweating palms. He had to make it. He had to reach the city. "I've got to tell them," he thought. "I've got to tell them I didn't pull that robbery."

A buzzing sound filled his ears. The night kept getting in his eyes. The advanced stage, Downing realized bitterly. The dangerous stage. The stage where he ought to take a dose of that miracle drug whose name he could never remember it was so long, and rest, hope this time wouldn't be the last. But he had forgotten the box of white pills in his haste. And there was no time to rest. He had to reach the city. He had to tell them. . . .

The roadster lurched and swayed down a road that dipped and curled like a road in a nightmare. Which wasn't far from the truth, for Downing's dimming perceptions warned him that the dividing line between reality and delirum was wearing very thin.

The old fever again. A deadly souvenir of his days as a soldier in the South Pacific. Downing tried to remember the name of it, and failed. He decided it didn't matter. The doctors he'd consulted had a name for it—a fancy Latin name—but that was all. The fever was one of those rare tropical things new in medical experience. The doctors knew that one of the miracle drugs for which they had another fancy name would temporarily knock the fever for a loop, but that was as far as they'd got.

So Downing had it again. The old fever had got back to its feet, and there was no gong to signal the end of each round. He's down! He's up! Over and over, on and on like that.

It was during one of his recurring attacks that Downing took a brief vacation from the business which he owned in partnership with Harris Ogden. The rest had done him good, and Downing had felt a gradual return to some semblance of his normal self. Then he'd learned from a week-old newspaper that he was being sought for questioning in a robbery which had taken place at the firm.

Ogden had been cautious in his statement to the reporters, but even so the finger of suspicion pointed rigidly at Downing. The combination to the safe had recently been changed, and the new one was known only to Downing and Ogden. And Downing's vacation, coinciding with the robbery, made it seem as though he had opened the safe and skipped with its contents. Nor had Downing helped matters by the abrupt way in which he had left. In the throes of a latest attack of fever, he had given no thought to details. Just a brief telephone call to Grace, a terse note to Ogden, and Downing had gone without telling either where he intended to stay.

DOWNING hoped fervently that his tardiness in learning of the robbery had not done him irreparable harm in the eyes of Grace and Ogden. He didn't care what other people thought. But Grace Winters was the girl he hoped to marry, and Harris Ogden was his best friend. What *they* thought mattered a lot.

Downing felt confident that he could establish his innocence readily enough. He had written the new combination to the safe on a slip of paper. This had obviously become dislodged from the pocket where he had placed it the day the fever struck him. He hadn't noticed it. He'd been down again. But thinking back, Downing did recall seeing Fred Radek, one of the clerks, pick something from the floor when the latter had left his office after delivering a sheaf of reports.

The object Radek had picked from

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the floor could likely have been the slip of paper bearing the new combination to the safe. In any event, Downing's return would lift suspicion from himself and focus it on those of the office staff who could have been in a position to find the slip of paper and use the information it contained. Just a little careful undercover investigation by the police—and somewhere along the line they would be sure to find someone who had been acting a bit too strangely, spending a bit too much.

It was this hope that kept Downing in motion against the dragging weight of his illness. He was innocent and he had to prove it. Every second that passed damned him further in the estimation of Grace and Ogden.

The roadster roared on through the night, its headlights plowing the darkness. Once a milepost flashed by, and Downing caught a glimpse of the figures. Just ten miles more and he'd be in the city. He knotted his jaw, grimly determined to last that long.

The image of the milepost was still in Downing's eyes when suddenly there swept over him a strange giddy feeling which he had never before experienced in connection with his attacks of fever. It was as though he were falling, falling endlessly. And then his body was subjected to a painful twisting and wrenching as though he were being twisted inside out. The next thing Downing knew it was daylight.

Daylight!

Shock brought his foot tromping down on the brakes of the roadster, bringing it to an abrupt stop. He stared about him incredulously. A great wave of cold dismay swept over him. During the interval while that strange sensation had wracked him, night had somehow changed into day!

Then Downing saw that this had not been the only transition. The world as he knew it had changed, too. For the sky was a vivid emerald green, and the sun that shone in it at zenith was a huge red-gold orb. This was no sun, this was no sky of Earth!

DOWNING sucked in a great shuddering breath, becoming aware as he did so of a host of rich tangy odors strange to him. What had happened? *What had happened?* The question thundered in his mind.

Darting bewildered glances about him, Downing saw that the roadster rested upon what seemed to be a broad highway. But it was not the familiar gray of concrete. Instead, it was a clear, glassy white. He probed his startled mind, but he could not remember having seen this sort of pavement before.

On either side of the highway was a smooth, grass-like expanse of olive-green that rolled gently away and away toward a range of low hills on the horizon. Spaced about with a curious suggestion of symmetry were strange trees with green boles and foliage of a brilliant yellow. Downing found the bizarre landscape almost park-like in appearance, and there were indications that it was carefully kept. And then he abruptly lost interest in his immediate surroundings as his eyes chanced upon a tiny white angularity almost lost in vegetation far down the highway. A house! It had to be. Downing prayed that it wasn't anything else. A house would mean people, and people would mean answers and guidance.

Downing jerked the roadster into motion. The mental shock brought on by the weird transformation had not done his fever any good. For now as the temporary stimulation wore off, an abrupt dizziness swept over him and a veil of corruscating darkness dropped before his eyes. The roadster lurched,

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almost ran off the highway. Downing shook his head sharply, fought for the control which was fast slipping from him.

The buzzing was back in his ears, only louder now. The voices of delirium called in a swelling chorus. The dark veil dropped before his eyes again, and this time it was more difficult to tear it away. Consciousness was a candleflame flickering in a constantly rising wind.

Downing saw the white object more clearly now, but it was as something glimpsed through a storm It was a house sure enough, a strange angular white house.

The storm that was his fever raged more fiercely. The candleflame flickered—flickered. Pure instinctive reaction brought Downing's foot down on the brake pedal as the roadster ran off the highway. A last flicker—and the voices of delirium rose suddenly in welcome.

DARKNESS, light, sound—jumbled together in an insane pattern of flashes and tones. Sweet, slow music. An abrupt clap of deafening thunder. Grace, in a vivid yellow dress that somehow hurt his eyes, smiling at him with her soft red mouth, her snub nose wrinkled in the old, familiar way. Then—an apparition with olive-green hair streaming out in a lashing gale and two red-gold orbs for eyes that ran at him with clawed hands screaming, "Thief! Thief!" And then he lay naked in the middle of a milky-white desert while a green sun beat down at him in wave after searing wave of heat. He was parched. His tongue was a woolly thing that swelled in his throat—larger, larger, became a huge melon that finally burst with a furious tinkling of crystalline bells. And then he was floating up, up, higher, ever higher, weightlessly, up, ever up, into a great soft darkness that folded gently around him, cuddled him warmly. "Sleep, baby, sleep. Close your bright blue eyes. . . ." A crash of cymbals, a roll of drums, and it began all over again. Over and over again. Years and years of it, and then merciful darkness, nothingness, utter and complete.

Light filtered through the darkness, grew, became a flood held in check by the gates of his eyelids. He lay very still, aware of his growing consciousness, searching among the ashes of delirium for fragments of reality. Recollection gradually came to him. The roadster. The strange world of the emerald-green sky and the red-gold sun. Impossible, he decided. Just figments of his fevered dreams.

Something warm and soft and gentle touched his forehead. The contact startled him. His eyes jerked open. The breath became a log-jam in his throat.

Downing found himself staring at a girl of exotic, fawn-like loveliness. Her hand had recoiled from his forehead the moment his eyes opened, and now she gazed back at him in tense comprehension of his scrutiny. She did not seem alarmed. It was more as though she had abruptly been confronted with a new situation and did not quite know how to adjust to it.

The silence between them thickened. Downing sensed that his was the next move, his the cue which would create a new state of relations. But for the moment the unearthly beauty of the girl who faced him held him fascinated.

Her unusual eyes were the first things he had noticed. They were tawny, flecked with gold, slightly tilted at their outer corners, and fringed heavily with dark lashes. Her skin was like rich cream with a faint golden tint. Against it her long hair glowed with the

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deep, dark red of mahogany. She was dressed in a tight-fitting sleeveless silver jacket. A short skirt of some silken blue material fell in graceful folds midway to her shapely knees.

The girl had been bending over him. Now she straightened slowly, a flush covering her cheeks.

DOWNING awoke suddenly to the realization that he was staring rudely. He felt instantly contrite. He smiled what he hoped was a smile of apology. "Hello," he said.

The girl's dark brows drew together in a dainty frown. *"Hal-loo?"* she echoed questioningly. She shook her head, her long tresses glinting with the movement. *"Nai shannaer atti."* Her voice was soft, curiously lilting.

"Don't get me, eh?" Downing decided. "Far as that goes, what you said is Greek to me, too." He translated with a smile and a shake of his head.

The girl studied him a moment with a child-like solemnity. Then she smiled in response, shrugged her slender shoulders. *"Naia shannaern etla voss."*

"That goes for me, too," Downing chuckled. He sobered abruptly as the knowledge struck him that he had somehow been acting out of character. For a moment the reason puzzled him. Then the answer flashed through him. He felt—*good!* He was weak, true enough, but he felt better than he'd had in years. The fever seemed to have left him entirely.

With that came awareness of something else. He was hungry—revenously hungry, in fact.

Downing pointed at his mouth, then rubbed his stomach. He screwed up his face as though in pain. The girl understood, for she smiled in quick sympathy and hurried from the room.

Downing seized the opportunity to examine his surroundings. He saw that he was in a large, pleasant room, furnished with a kind of simple elegance. Drapes of a deep rose color covered one wall in which obviously was located a window, since a bar of sunlight slanted down through an opening in the material. A large chest of some lustrous dark wood stood against another wall, and beside it was a full-length mirror set in a metal frame. There was a curtained doorway beyond which Downing decided lay a bath or something of the sort. In the middle of the room stood a chair and table of strange design. The bed in which Downing lay was low and box-like, but fully as soft and comfortable as any bed he had ever known.

Downing came to the conclusion that it was a nice room. There were no frills about it, yet the obvious luxury of its simple furnishings gave it a certain charm.

Downing stretched, revelling in his sensations of well-being. He'd had the fever so long, he'd forgotten what it was like to feel really well. Must be something about the climate, he decided.

ABRUPTLY he sobered. The climate of—where? Where was he? What had happened to him? Stark memory came of the falling experience, the sudden twisting and wrenching—and then, the bizarre world of the green sky and the red-gold sun. Obviously, he was still there, to judge from the strangeness of the room in which he lay and the exotic beauty of the girl whom he had seen upon awakening. As to how he had reached the room at all, Downing decided that the occupants of the house he had glimpsed before losing consciousness in the roadster had found him and carried him there.

Anxiety kindled within Downing as he wondered if it would be possible to

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return to Earth. He couldn't stay here —wherever "here" was. Everything he knew or loved was back in the world from which he had come. He thought with sudden poignancy of Ogden, chubby and gay, the best friend he'd ever had. And he thought of Grace, with her snub nose and her laughing blue eyes, her gleaming brown hair falling in soft curls about her shoulders. Grace—the girl he was to marry.

Downing resisted the sudden temptation to throw aside his covers, return to his roadster, and drive, drive, until somehow the familiar sights of Earth were once more about him. Ogden and Grace must not be allowed to go on thinking that he was a thief—hiding with his loot. He had to prove to them that he was innocent.

Apprehension chilled Downing like an icy wind. He had to return. He had to. But—but what if there was no return?

Light footfalls heralded the reappearance of the exotic other-world girl. She bore a tray which she set down on the bed beside Downing. On the tray were a bowl of gruel or soup, a goblet containing a thick, yellow-tinted liquid which might have been milk, and a large platter of bright strange fruit.

Downing did not need the girl's gestured invitation to spur him on. He fell to hungrily. The food was delicious, though as strange to his taste as was everything else to his other senses.

The girl went to the windows and pulled aside the drapes. Sunlight poured into the room in a rich rosy flood. That done, the girl became busily occupied with the room, arranging the furniture with minute care and dabbing at their gleaming surfaces with a wadded cloth which she had brought with her. From time to time, she glanced curiously at Downing as if to note his progress on the food.

Finally Downing was finished. He leaned back upon the bed with a sigh of contentment. The girl came forward to take the tray and dishes.

"Dreanna?" she queried in her soft voice.

"If you mean was it good, it certainly was," Downing said. "And, say, there are a few things I'd like to know." He pointed at himself. "Ross," he said. "Ross Downing." He pointed at the girl and looked a question.

Her smile had a trace of shyness. "Lethra," she responded.

Downing pointed next to the window, beyond which showed a patch of emerald-green sky and an expanse of rolling olive-green fields. He looked another question.

"Valledon," the girl said.

WHAT Downing had wanted was the name of the world which he had so inexplicably entered. He wondered if the name the girl had given him was merely the name of the nation or continent wherein the house was located. He decided to make sure.

Downing pointed to the window again, but this time he waved an arm in an all-inclusive gesture. The girl gave a smile and nod of sudden comprehension. "Jorelle," she said.

Jorelle, then, must be the name of this other-place, Downing thought. But —where was Jorelle?

Downing ceased further speculation on the subject as a tall elderly man strode quietly into the room. He glanced with friendly interest at Downing, then looked inquiringly at the girl. She spoke rapidly in her soft, lilting voice. Her explanation was charmingly animated. Watching her, Downing heard his name mentioned. Then the girl pointed to the elderly man. "Churran," she told Downing.

Downing grinned and held out his

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hand. "Pleased to meet you," he said.

Churran made a stately bow. Then, noticing Downing's extended hand, he looked puzzled. Obviously, Downing decided, the shaking of hands was a gesture unknown in Jorelle. He dropped his hand quickly and sought to make up for his mistake by replying with a bow of his own. Performed as it was in a reclining position, the effect must have been comic, for Churran smiled while Lethra's soft laughter chimed merrily.

Churran was clearly Lethra's father, for there was a strong physical resemblance between the two. Like the girl, he wore a sleeveless silver jacket, but with long, loose trousers bound in at the ankles. He was smooth-shaven, his grizzled gray locks held back from temples and forehead by a silver circlet. There was a quiet dignity about his appearance that Downing instantly liked.

Churran did not stay long—or rather Lethra did not let him stay. She bustled her father from the room, energetically straightened the bedcovers about Downing, and then, gathering up the tray from the table where she had placed it, she left.

The food had made Downing sleepy. He closed his eyes and shortly after he drifted off into slumber.

THE days that followed might have been idyllic were it not for Downing's constant gnawing desire to return to Earth and vindicate himself in the eyes of Grace and Ogden. His earlier feeling of well-being had not been illusory, since strength quickly returned to him. At last came the day when Lethra would permit him to leave the bed and don his clothes. She led him out to a garden at the rear of the house.

The garden was large and well-tended. In the center of it was a small fountain built of some pink stone and surmounted by the metal figure of a fairy-like being holding a shell in one extended hand. Water dripped from the shell and fell into the pool below with musical splashings. Large trees with brilliant yellow foliage shaded flagstone walks dotted here and there with benches made of the same pink stone as the fountain. Birds of vivid rainbow plumage flew twittering and chirping in and out among the trees, and the smell of myriad banked flowers hung with heady fragrance on the air.

Lethra took Downing on a tour of the garden, and then, as though fearing the exercise would be too much for him, she pulled him down upon a stone bench. *"Dreanna?"* she asked.

"Swell!" Downing said. He really meant it. The riotous tropical beauty of the place was compelling for all its strangeness of color and detail. If Grace were with him, he knew he could be very happy here. But Grace was far away—very far away. In another world. Downing wondered if he would ever see her again—Grace, and Ogden, and Chicago, with all its old familiar sights.

He turned at a light touch on his arm. Lethra was gazing at him worriedly. *"Atti nai serrata?"*

Downing forced a smile and shook his head. Lethra smiled, too, but her tawny eyes were troubled.

A silence fell between them. Downing gazed at the ground, lost again in brooding. Only dimly was he conscious of the music of the fountain and the voices of the birds.

Suddenly Lethra rose, and as Downing looked up in response to the movement, she motioned to him with a graceful motion of one slender arm. Downing caught a glimpse of her lovely face before she turned to walk back toward the house. It was sad. Down-

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ing rose to follow her, chiding himself for troubling the girl with his worries.

Lethra took Downing now to a small building located a short distance from the rear of the main house. It was a workshop or something of the sort. Downing saw workbenches littered with tools, various small machines, shelves and cabinets filled with a wide assortment of objects. Churran was bent over what seemed to be a metal-working device, shaping a spinning silver ovoid with a cutting tool. He looked up from his work at the entrance of Downing and the girl, smiled in welcome.

CHURRAN was a silversmith or an artisan of a closely allied nature. Lethra showed Downing vases, goblets, and plates, all exquisitely wrought of strange yet obviously precious metals. Creating things with his hands had always held a strong fascination for Downing. He found Churran's work intensely interesting. It was with the eagerness of a boy that he touched the machines and the tools and watched Churran make signs of explanation. The morning passed swiftly while Downing absorbed himself in the wonders of Churran's workshop. His interest seemed to please Lethra and Churran immensely.

After the noon meal, Downing returned to the workshop with Churran. At Downing's own insistence, Churran provided him with a piece of abrasive cloth, and Downing set to work, polishing the first of a set of goblets which Churran was engaged in turning out.

Evening came. Further work for the day was halted. Downing's arms ached, and the heaviness of his head warned him that he wasn't as well as he'd thought. His activity, light as it had been, had made itself only too strongly felt. He decided to postpone his plans for leaving Jorelle until he was absolutely certain of his recovery.

As he sat in the garden with Lethra and Churran, Downing remembered his roadster. Concern for the safety of the car struck him abruptly. He questioned his hosts about it as best he could through the medium of signs.

Churran assured Downing that the roadster was intact. Downing's interest in the car seemed to sadden Churran and Lethra. They gazed at each other with a kind of quiet despair.

The days passed quickly for Downing. He spent the greater part of each in Churran's workshop, laboring industriously over such minor tasks as he could perform. He was learning rapidly to use the various tools and machines, and his increasing skill seemed a constant delight to Churran. He was learning the language of Jorelle, too, for Lethra and Churran seized every opportunity to explain the meaning of words to him. His vocabulary was soon large enough to encompass simple conversations.

"You are not of Jorelle," Churran told Downing one evening as they sat in the garden. "Is it true, then, that you have come from some other world?"

DOWNING nodded slowly. "From a world called Earth. But where it is now, and how I arrived here, are things unknown to me." Downing explained about his attack of fever and how, while driving the roadster, he had suddenly found himself in Jorelle.

"But is not your strange machine a vehicle for traveling between worlds?" Lethra asked in surprise. "Such Churran and I have thought it to be."

"Why, no," Downing responded. "It is merely a device for traveling on the surface of a world." He gazed at Lethra narrowly. "What do you know of traveling between worlds?"

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"It is said our people once possessed this ability," Lethra replied. "Legends tell that we originally came from a world called Trantor. We of Jorelle are—how shall I say it?—travelers who go to live in another place."

"Colonists," Downing supplied.

"A strange word," Lethra said. "Anyway, not many of us came to live here on Jorelle. Before the machines that traveled between worlds could bring more, there was what legends call a war. Because of this, the machines no longer came to Jorelle."

"War!" Churran said abruptly. "It is an evil word. We do not speak it here, except in connection with the legends."

"But is there no war on Jorelle?" Downing asked.

"No," Churran said. "Why should there be? There are too few of us here on Jorelle for war. We are happy. Our system of service keeps our few wants amply supplied."

"Service?" Downing echoed. "Is that your term for government?".

Churran smiled. "And what is government?"

"Why, it is a body of selected men who make and enforce the laws by which a nation is ruled."

"We have no government on Jorelle," Churran said with a shake of his graying locks. "And no laws save those of service, which are the basic laws of survival among civilized men. Stated simply, to obtain your bread, you must be of service to the man who makes the bread."

"Is this literal?" Downing wanted to know. "I mean, do you deal directly with the butcher, the baker, and the weaver, exchanging your products for theirs?"

"No. Everyone deals through a service distribution center. My product, once it reaches the service distribution center, becomes the property of others, just as the products of others become my property. But everything is apportioned off according to the needs of the individual. No one product is considered more important than other products. No one individual is entitled to any more than other individuals."

"Is it not thus on your world?" Lethra asked Downing.

HE LOOKED away. "No. . . . The people of my world work for a medium of exchange which we call money. With money they buy the things they need. Some make more money than others, and are able to buy not only more things but better things. And some do not make enough money, and never have all the things they need."

"Madness!" Churran growled. "Sheer madness. How can all be happy in a world like that?"

"Very few are happy," Downing admitted with a sigh.

"And yet you wish to return there," Lethra said.

Downing shrugged. "It is where I belong. Everything I know or love is there."

A silence fell over Lethra and Churran. It was now too dark for Downing to see their faces, but he sensed, from the special quality of their silence, that his words had saddened them as they always did. He knew they wanted very much for him to stay, and in other circumstances he would have been only too glad to do so. Jorelle was a beautiful world, a place where a man could be happy and at peace. And both Lethra and Churran were two of the finest people he had ever known. He could easily grow to love them—especially Lethra, who would make the prettiest, sweetest wife a man could ever hope to have. But, Downing reminded him-

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self, he already had these things in Grace and Ogden. And more, they were his kind of people. They were of the world which he knew and belonged to.

Churran's voice came suddenly into the darkness. "I have been thinking about how it could have happened that you entered Jorelle. I have read the old books—the books written by the men who built the machines that once traveled between the worlds—and I think I know. The old books tell of worlds existing side by side—yet the one completely unknown to the other. It is possible that such is the relationship between your world and Jorelle. Per- at one certain point the barrier between Earth and Jorelle was very thin. You happened to reach this point in your vehicle while ill with what you call fever. You entered Jorelle—not because of the thinness of the barrier at that point, but because of your state of mind brought on by the fever. The old books hint that there are strange powers slumbering within our minds. Who knows but that your fever awakened one of them, giving you the ability to enter coexistent worlds where the barriers between them happened to be very thin?"

"It is an interesting subject," Downing said. His voice quickened with eagerness. "But . . . but do you think it is possible for me to get back to Earth?"

"Perhaps," Churran responded slowly. "You are not native to Jorelle. Thus it should be easier for you to enter your world than it was to leave it."

It was a slim hope, but Downing clung to it. He decided to put Churran's theory to a test. He was now completely well. The roadster was waiting on a stretch of lawn beside the house where he had brought it some weeks before. Everything was in readiness.

IN THE morning Downing began his preparations for leaving. He had been wearing a set of garments belonging to Churran. Now he donned his own which, due to Lethra's painstaking care, were in excellent condition. He gave the roadster a final check-over, and then he was ready.

Lethra and Churran stood by to see him off. Lethra's tawny eyes swam in tears which she was futilely trying to hold back, and sadness deepened the lines of Churran's face.

Downing touched Lethra's cheek. "Smile, little Lethra. Memory of you with tears in your eyes would not be a happy one. And the only memories I want to take with me are happy ones."

With a superbly gallant effort, Lethra smiled—but two large tears rolled sparkling down her cheeks.

"That's right," Downing said. "That's the way I'll remember you. Farewell, Lethra."

"Farewell," she said softly. "Farewell, Ross."

Downing gripped Churran's arm. Then he turned, quickly, slid in under the wheel of the roadster, and roared off. Downing sped down the road in the direction from which he had approached Churran's house when first finding himself in Jorelle. Occasionally he slowed to glance back toward the house and note its diminishing size. Finally it was just a white angularity almost lost in vegetation far down the road. Downing tensed. *Now,* he thought. *Now!*

His senses flaring alertly, Downing cruised the roadster along the road. But the twisting and wrenching sensation did not come, though he went past the spot where he judged he had earlier entered Jorelle. Was return to Earth impossible after all? he wondered with dismay. Then an idea struck him.

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Churran had said the translation from Earth to Jorelle involved the mind. Thus, perhaps, merely touching the critical juncture between the two worlds was not enough. Perhaps the mind had again to be brought into play.

But how? Downing thought despairingly. How could he know how his mind had acted during fever? Abruptly Downing remembered Churran's statement that it should be easier to gain access to Earth than it had been to leave it. Maybe will-power, the sheet desire to get back to Earth, would be enough to get him over the borderline.

Downing spun the roadster about and once more cruised down the road. This time, however, he reiterated over and over in his mind the overpowering wish to get back mingled with the insistent, confident assertion that he *would* get back.

AND it worked! A sudden giddiness seized him, as though he were falling, falling endlessly and to nowhere. Then—the familiar twisting and wrenching sensation. When it had gone, Downing found himself on a road which was the well-remembered gray of concrete. The sky overhead was blue, and the landscape was the old untidy one of weeds and fences and advertisements.

Downing's elation was cut short as the realization struck into him that it was cold. Cold? He frowned in bewilderment. It had been late spring when he had last seen Earth, and he had been in Jorelle a little less than two months. It should now be summer, and warm, yet—yet somehow it was cold.

Downing glanced at the sky again. Now he saw that evening was approaching. He estimated that he would reach the city shortly before dark. He hunched over the steering wheel of the roadster, and his foot pressed the accelerator down, down.

A gas station appeared up the road. Downing had earlier noted that his supply of gas was getting low. Now he decided to refill while he had the opportunity. He slowed the roadster, turned it into the driveway of the gas station.

Downing fidgeted impatiently while the tank was being filled. After what seemed years, the station attendant approached the window for his change.

Downing thrust a bill at the man and was shifting the roadster into gear when suddenly the station attendant spoke.

"Say, mister, if I were you I'd do something about those license plates."

"What's wrong with them?" Downing demanded.

"They're two years out of date," the station attendant said. "You're going to get pinched if a cop catches you."

"Two years out of date!" Downing gasped. "But—but that's impossible!"

"It's possible, all right. Take a look at them yourself." The station attendant peered searchingly at Downing. "Say, where you been to lost track of time like that?"

"Vacation," Downing muttered. "A long vacation." He shrugged aside the proferred handful of change and completed his act of putting the roadster into motion. His thoughts whirled chaotically. Two years! *Two years!* Incredibly, two years had passed during his sojurn in Jorelle of a little less than two months!

Miles swept by under the spinning wheels of the roadster while Downing mulled the chilling knowledge over in his mind, warming it for assimulation, for dazed acceptance as fact. Time-rate, he thought abruptly. The time-rate of Jorelle was not the same as that of Earth. One month on Jorelle

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was almost equivalent to one year on Earth.

DOWNING was appalled. How could he ever hope now to convince Grace and Ogden of his innocence? The passing of two years must have hardened their belief in his guilt beyond all hope of cracking.

Downing thought despairingly of turning the roadster around and going back to Jorelle. Then he remembered that return was possible only through a special mental condition brought on by fever—and he was perfectly well.

He sought desperately for some course of action. With Grace and Ogden against him, there was no one to whom he could turn for help. And what money he had wouldn't last very long. The thought of starting anew, almost penniless and under an assumed identity, was humiliating.

Abruptly the though come to Downing that during the past two years the real thief might have been found. Forlorn as the possibility seemed, Downing decided to act on it. He pressed down on the accelerator with renewed determination.

Night was falling when Downing reached the city. The coldness of which he had earlier become aware was now emphasized by a light flurry of snow. A clock set over the entrance of a building he passed showed the time to be a little after five. Ogden should still be at the office, Downing thought. He'd go there first of all.

Downing pulled up in front of the familiar squat building which had once housed the firm of Ogden and Downing. The illuminated sign jutting out over the door now announced it as Harris Ogden and Co. The last trickles of a tide of homeward bound employees were flowing out into the street. Downing pulled his hat low over his eyes and waited until all had gone. Then he pulled open the door and strode quickly into the building.

Entering the reception room, Downing saw light streaming through the partly opened door of Ogden's office. He pushed past the gate in the wooden railing and approached the door. As he did so, he became aware of voices.

". . . thought I'd surprise you darling. Know what today is?"

"If you expected me to forget, you're doomed to disappointment. Our anniversary, of course."

There was a sudden silence. Downing sucked the silence into his lungs along with a deep slow breath. The first voice had been Grace's, the second Ogden's.

Straightening with a return of purpose, Downing pushed the door open, strode into the room beyond. Grace and Ogden were wrapped in a close embrace, oblivious of everything save the pressure of their lips, one on the other.

THEY parted. Ogden saw Downing first. His chubby face paled as though at sight of a ghost. Startled at his expression, Grace whirled.

"Ross!" The name burst from the two of them almost simultaneously.

Downing's smile was thin-lipped and sardonic. "Well! Nobody seems to have been doing much crying over me. The mice will play while the cat's away, eh?" He was bitterly sarcastic. He was using the wrong approach, and he knew it. He had forgotten that two months to him was two years to them. But it had hurt, entering the room and finding the girl he had been engaged to marry in the arms of his best friend.

Ogden pulled up his plump figure with indignation. "See here, Ross, if anyone's in a position to make explanations it's yourself. As for your remark about the mice and the cat, I'll have

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you understand that Grace is now my wife. We've been married exactly a year today." Ogden's full lips twisted in a sneer. "What have you come back for? Were you hoping to find the safe open?"

Downing shook his head gravely. "I came back to clear myself, Harris."

"After two years? Don't be a fool. Better take my advice and go back into hiding."

"The police are still looking for you, Ross," Grace put in. "If they find you here in the city, it'll mean prison."

Downing held up a hand. "Please. You both are thoroughly convinced of my guilt, and I don't blame you. All I ask is that you listen to my explanation." Downing spoke earnestly and softly. He began with the day the fever struck him, and, dazed, losing the slip of paper bearing the new combination to the company safe. He told of having seen Fred Radek pick up something from the floor of his office. Then the vacation on which he had gone to overcome his fever. The newspaper and his trip back to the city. The weird transition to Jorelle, and finally his return, to find that two years had passed.

"A likely story," Ogden grunted. "How on earth you ever expected people as intelligent as Grace and myself to swallow such a fairy tale is beyond my understanding."

"I know just how it sounds," Downing said patiently. "Give me credit for a little intelligence myself, won't you? Do you think I'd be telling you such a story if it weren't true? I swear by everything that's honorable and decent that this actually happened." Downing threw out his hands imploringly. "Harris, think back upon our friendship. Think of the swell times we had together. Was there ever anything about my character or personality which would suggest I was capable of doing such a rotten thing as robbing the safe?" Downing turned to the girl. "Grace, do you?"

THEY were cold and unmoved. The sneer crept back upon Ogden's face. Grace lowered her eyes and looked away.

"Look here," Downing pursued doggedly. "Harris, after the theft do you recall any of the office staff suddenly quitting, wearing new clothes, coming into money, or anything at all the least bit out of the ordinary happening?"

Ogden shrugged plump shoulders. "After two years it isn't easy to remember a good deal. But I do seem to recall Fred Radek quitting a few months after the theft. He was supposed to have left for another job, or something of the sort."

"Radek!" Downing exclaimed. "The same man who picked something from the floor of my office—something which very likely could have been the combination to the safe!"

Ogden shrugged again. "You'd have to find Radek to prove anything. And in two years he's had enough time to put a lot of distance behind himself. Anyway, I prefer to let sleeping dogs lie. This matter is finished as far as I'm concerned."

"But . . . but aren't you going to give me a chance to clear myself?" Downing asked in dismay.

"And do what amounts almost to cutting my own throat at the same time?" Ogden countered. He laughed harshly. "If I were successful in helping you, I'd have to take you back into the business as a partner. And why should I do that, when the business as it now is, is the result of my own efforts during the past two years? No—I've got all the gravy on my plate, and I intend to keep it there."

"Grace . . . ." Downing turned to her

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as though he were a drowning man and she a straw.

Grace refused to look at him. "Harris is now my husband," she said coldly. "His interests are my interests. I agree perfectly with what he says."

Downing was stunned. The blood roared in his ears, and the room seemed to rock crazily. He felt cold and hollow and aching.

Ogden crooked an arm to glance at his wristwatch. "Grace and I have plans for the evening. Our anniversary, you know. Take my advice, Ross, and go back to wherever you came from. The police are still looking for you, and if you persist in molesting me, I won't hesitate to turn you in." He reached suddenly into the breast pocket of his expensively tailored suit and extracted a wallet. "If you need some money, I'll be glad—" Ogden broke off abruptly and backed away. "Ross! Don't you dare touch me!"

Downing continued to glare in cold fury. "I wouldn't dirty my hands. And that goes for both of you!" He turned and stalked from the room.

BACK in his roadster, Downing drove aimlessly, no thought of a particular destination in mind. He coughed several times, unaware at first of doing so. Then, as his coughs increased, he grew alarmed. He realized he'd been driving for some time now in the bitter cold, and he had no overcoat. His throat felt raw and his nose was stuffed. He decided that his stay in Jorelle had somehow increased his receptivity to colds.

Jorelle! Downing seized at the thought eagerly. Jorelle, the world that was nowhere—the nowhere that was his last bid for happiness. He thought with sudden poignancy of Lethra and Churran. In memory he saw Lethra's strange tawny eyes and the deep red hair that hung in glowing splendor about her shoulders. Yearning to be back in Jorelle ached abruptly within him.

"Hey, buddy, pull over to the curb!"

The rough voice shook Downing from his brooding. He turned his head to see a police car gliding alongside his roadster.

Panic swept him like an icy wind. The police!

Ogden and Grace had warned him that he was still being sought. Had they, fearing for their security, put the police on his trail?

Downing saw the results of capture with harsh clarity. He'd have no chance to prove his innocence. The passing of two years had destroyed every hope of doing so. He'd be convicted, shut up in a hard gray cell. The fever would come back. He'd have attacks of it over and over. The fever and the long years in prison would kill him slowly and inexorably.

He couldn't allow himself to be captured. He had to reach Jorelle—or die!

Downing roused into flashing activity. Jamming his foot down upon the accelerator, he turned the wheel of the roadster hard over, cut directly in front of the police car. The driver automatically braked to prevent a collision. Downing roared across the opposite traffic lane just as the lights changed. A stream of vehicles flowed into motion, blocking off the police car effectively.

DOWNING piled distance behind himself. Finally he pulled up into the dark mouth of an alley to rest and plan. His heart seemed to be beating in his throat, and breath was something he had to fight for. His coughing had increased in force and frequency. Chilling spasms wracked him, followed by

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intervals of clammy warmth. His fever was coming back. He sensed it with the conviction of long familiarity.

But this time he welcomed its coming. The fever was his passport to Jorelle.

Several times while Downing huddled in the car, alternately shivering and sweating, police cars prowled past his refuge. The alarm had been sent out. They were hunting for him relentlessly.

Downing waited, while his head grew heavy and aching and the fever kindled and finally flamed within him as of old. Night deepened. There was another flurry of falling snow. A thin biting wind lifted the snow and sent it whirling and twisting in white clouds along the street.

As Downing sat thinking, it suddenly occured to him that the police might not be seeking him in connection with the theft at all. It could very likely have been his outdated license plates that had drawn their attention to him. But the damage had been done. By his very act of fleeing, he had labeled himself a suspicious character, someone to be sought and questioned. If he were taken into custody, his identity would be discovered, and his arrest for the theft would follow as a matter of course.

At last Downing decided it was safe to venture from his hiding place. Enough time had elapsed for the police to lose their first flush of enthusiasm for the chase.

Downing tooled the car from the alley, and keeping to dark, less-frequented streets, began to wend his way out of the city. The houses were beginning to thin when abruptly the wail of a police siren rose behind Downing. He twisted around in his seat, darted a glance behind him. A police car was coming after him—and fast!

Downing ground the accelerator into the floorboards. The roadster leaped ahead like a spurred horse.

Downing hunched over the wheel, fighting for clarity of vision through the fog which was beginning to veil his eyes. The wail of the siren in his rear rose in volume.

Downing jerked the roadster up one street, down another, over and over, in desperate attempts to throw the police car off his trail. Because of the fact that he took almost incredible risks in doing so, he succeeded momentarily. The wail of the siren still followed him, but the glare of pursuing headlights was gone. Downing headed for the road and open country—and Jorelle.

Downing had shaken the police car in a sparsely settled subdivision. Streets were few, and the police quickly regained his trail. Downing had made a gain in distance, but his pursuers quickly closed the gap.

It was all straight driving now. Downing had a lead, and he intended to keep it. He had the accelerator rammed down as far as it would go. He found it increasingly hard to see. A darkening mist swam before his eyes, and each attempt to remove it took more effort than the last. Every jolt and sway of the roadster brought pain that threatened to split his head. And then the road began to twist and curl like a great, gray worm.

SUDDENLY Downing became aware that the shrill voice of the siren behind him had grown louder. Was the police car gaining on him? Glancing back, he saw a single headlight bobbing in his wake, growing larger. A highway patrolman had poined the chase!

Despair clutched at Downing sickeningly. On the motorcycle the patrolman would soon catch up. If Downing

(Concluded on page 178)

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And then the storm struck in its full fury. A mountainous wave seemed to leap skyward, and in

CAPTAIN SORENSON shook his head. "I don't see," he said, "How you expect to find a Viking ship in the Caribbean!"

"I never expected to," Tom Grace admitted, "but when I ran across that old account of how a hurricane uncovered one for a brief time I decided to take a chance."

The captain looked down over the

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The SMILING WIFE

By H. B. HICKEY

When the woman smiled down at them, sailors knew that the weather would be calm. But then one day she wept . . .

the center of the torrent a face took shape, the face of a beautiful woman smiling at them . . .

rail of the Narvik at the blue waters and shrugged his broad shoulders. "Of course, it doesn't matter to me or my crew. We are being paid. Then, too, we're all Scandinavians so we'd naturally take an interest in the search for one of the ships of the Norsemen."

He was about to continue when Grace's wife, Velma, appeared at their side. She still wore the frown that had

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creased her pretty face since almost the start of the voyage.

"Well," she demanded, "when are we going to turn around and get back to civilization?"

Her husband was disgusted. "I told you before we left New York," he said, "that if you minded being away from land for months at a time you'd better not come along."

"What a way to spread a honeymoon!" she exploded.

Tom gave her a dirty look; it was not the first time she had said that. "I thought you accepted my job along with me when we were married. When I told you that it would be like being married to a sailor you said that sounded like fun."

"You didn't give me much of a choice," she told him. "It was either come along or stay in that dinky little apartment that's all we can afford on the salary the foundation pays you."

Sorenson excused himself and walked aft. He was tired of hearing her whine about having to be the only woman on a small boat with nothing to do. He could think of plenty of ways in which she might have made herself useful.

Velma Grace was decorative in a dark slinky way. It had been a surprise to those who knew her when she married Tom Grace instead of one of her wealthier admirers. At the time it had seemed adventurous to marry a man who worked for an historical research foundation and who traveled all over the world.

Too soon she found that the salary which foundations are able to pay could not keep her in the manner to which she was accustomed. She was not one who would resign herself to the life of a poor man's wife.

TOM tried to be more pleasant. "I'm sorry, honey," he said. "I know it's tough for you. We've got the ship so loaded with our gear that there's no room to turn around in. There's only one more stop though, before we turn back. I'm afraid we've been on a wild goose chase anyway. Without a map we had almost no chance to find that beach in the old account just by description."

He had to admit to himself that if it weren't for Velma he'd never think of giving up. From the old document he'd uncovered he'd got a good enough description to know that if he found the ship described there he'd have a prize. His lean features lit up for a second.

He heard the captain calling him and looked up. Sorenson's usually stolid face was flushed with excitement.

"I think we've found it!" Sorenson yelled. He pointed dead ahead and Tom followed his gaze.

About a mile ahead he could see a small island rising out of the sea. As the ship drew closer the beach became visible and behind it a wall of cliffs that certainly resembled those described in the old document.

Tom hurried up to the bridge and clapped the captain on the back. "That's it all right," he shouted. "You can see that big rock atop the cliff there!"

Some of the crew heard them shouting and ran forward to get a better look. There were only fifteen men in all but they had been chosen carefully. Most of them were no longer young but they had spent their lives at sea and they were tough and strong.

Larsen, the mate, came up. "I think, sir," he said, "that we better drop anchor here. Looks like reefs ahead."

Sorenson nodded. "Mr. Grace and I and three men will take the small boat in. If it's the place we're looking for we'll find a better anchorage and get the gear ashore."

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As the little boat drew close to the beach Tom could see that the reefs were broken sufficiently for them to get through without danger.

"It ought to be just below that rock," he told Sorenson. "If the ship is here we should be able to find some trace of it without too much digging."

The three seamen set to with a will and since the sand was not hard had got down pretty far in a short time. It was Stoneberg, one of the older men, who hit something first.

"I just hit wood!" he yelled.

He was right. Just under his feet in the little pit he was standing in was a plank. Tom came running over. He himself had grabbed a shovel and in a moment he was feverishly digging beside Stoneberg.

At the end of fifteen minutes they had uncovered enough of the wood to disclose that they were standing directly athwart the rail of the ship. When the hole they were in got big enough another seaman joined them.

Sorenson and the last seaman shoveled sand away from the top of the pit as fast as the other three could toss it up. By the end of the hour they had already got about ten feet of the deck clear.

Tom wiped the sweat from his face and grinned up at the captain who was now a good twelve feet above him.

"Might as well quit now," he called up. "No use trying to dig this out by ourselves."

HE AND the seaman clambered out of the hole into which they had dug themselves. The captain was looking up at the sky.

"We'd better go back to the ship and start unloading the gear and supplies. It'll take us a couple of days even at this rate to get the hull clear."

Tom Grace agreed. "If we hurry we'll have everything ashore by evening. That way we can get started first thing in the morning. With fifteen of us working it shouldn't take longer than two days."

They slept on the beach that night in pup tents. Tom had prepared for a much tougher job than that which seemed to face them and the whole beach was cluttered with equipment.

They had breakfast just before dawn and the first light of day found them ready to start digging again. The men set to with a will. A strange excitement seemed to grip them all. Only Velma Grace was immune to it. While the men dug she lay on the sand sunning herself and reading a novel she had brought with her.

"We'll start with the section we've exposed and work out both ways from that," Tom ordered the men.

By evening of that day the entire deck and a good deal of the hull were clear. It had happened that they had started to dig at a point which was the farthest down. From there the rail curved upward and the beach sloped down so that at the prow and stern the ship was not more than five feet below the surface. It proved to be about forty feet in length.

"It's almost impossible to believe that a ship this size could be sailed half around the world," Tom said to Sorenson.

The captain laughed. "My ancestors were good sailors," he reminded Tom. "And you can see that they built as well as they sailed. This ship is at least seven hundred years old and so far we haven't found a seam that's started."

Tom pointed down near the center of the deck. "If they hadn't lost their mast they might have made it back at that," he said.

Sorenson gave him a queer look. "Come over to the side here, Mr.

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Grace," he requested. "I want to talk about that with you."

Tom was puzzled as he followed the captain away from the others. What had caused that strange expression to suddenly fleet across the other's face?

WHEN they were far enough away so that no one could overhear them Sorenson turned back to Tom. "I didn't want the others to hear this," he said. "But I noticed while we were talking that two of the men uncovered the prow. Did you see the figurehead?"

Tom shook his head in the negative and the captain went on.

"It's a woman who is sad," he whispered.

"What about it?" Tom asked. "All the viking ships had figureheads on the prow. What's unusual about this one?"

"It's Erik Erikson's ship, 'The Smiling Wife'," Sorenson whispered. He was trembling.

Tom was stunned. "Do you mean to say there's a curse over this ship?"

There was fear in the captain's eyes as he bobbed his head up and down. "Haven't you ever heard of 'The Smiling Wife'?" he asked.

"Of course, I have. The story is that Erik had a beautiful wife who died while he was on a voyage. He made a figure of her for the prow and she was supposed to have led him safely through all danger at sea. Isn't that it?"

"Only in part," the captain said. "The whole story is that he made eyes for her out of a pair of precious blue stones that were the same color as her own and it was with these that she was able to see and guide the ship. Then one day one of his men stole the stones and she stopped smiling; from then on she was blind. It was on that trip that Erik was lost and never seen again.

"I'm afraid that some of the men know the story and will refuse to go any further if they find out what ship they're working on."

"Don't tell me you take that story seriously!" Tom snapped.

"You forget that my men and I were raised on tales like that," Sorenson said. "Then, too, the sea makes men superstitious. Besides, you must admit that the figure on the prow is not smiling now!"

If Tom had any thought of concealing the identity of the ship from the men he was too late. One of the men had gotten a good look at the figurehead and there was already a heated discussion going on.

Sorenson and he ran back and found Larsen yelling at the men in Swedish.

The mate looked relieved to see his superior. "They want to stop working!" he told the captain.

Tom interrupted. "Why?"

"Because the ship is bewitched," one of the men told him. "As long as Erik's wife is sad it is bad luck to be on board this ship."

Velma had come up in time to hear the exchange and she started to laugh. "You've a fine lot of children in your crew," she chided Sorenson.

Tom cut her off sharply. Some of the men had begun to get red in the face. "Look here," he said to them, "The ship is on the beach and nothing can go wrong. After all, you don't have to sail her back." It took him an hour of arguing to get the men back to work.

"How do you intend to get her back?" Sorenson asked later when the two were alone again.

"You can tow it," Tom said. "I'll stay on board to handle the wheel and all the men will remain with you. Maybe Larsen will be willing to stay aboard with me, but if not I'll handle it alone!"

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BY THE third morning the hull was clear and the job of rolling the ship down to the water was begun. The men had rigged up a mast and as far as Tom or Sorenson could see she was entirely seaworthy.

It was that day that Stoneberg found the little leather bag. It had been lying directly beneath the keel and he saw it there as he dug under it. When he opened the pouch and saw what was inside he let out a yell.

By the time Tom got there he found all the men smiling again. They were gathered around Stoneberg, talking excitedly.

"What's up?" Tom asked.

Stoneberg spread his palm. In it were two glittering sapphires, each as large as an egg!

The sailor looked up at Tom. "Her eyes!" he said. "Her eyes!"

"I wonder if you couldn't be right," Tom said. "There's only one way to find out." He held out his hand. "Give them here."

Stoneberg handed the sapphires to him and Tom started forward toward the prow, the entire crew on his heels. There was a board walk from the deck to the prow and a small platform, built just behind the figurehead, where in viking days the lookout stood.

The eyes of Erik's wife were hooded by heavy wooden lids and it was obvious that the sapphires would not fit. However, Tom decided to give it a try anyway.

By accident he discovered the secret. In trying to force the sapphires into the eye sockets Tom found that the eyelids could be forced back. Above them in the forehead was a spring and as soon as the gem was in place and the pressure released the lid sprang back to hold the eye clamped in.

When the eyes were in place Tom turned back and found Velma at his elbow. In his excitement he had not noticed that she had been behind him all the time since he had been handed the jewels.

"Are you going to leave those sapphires in there?" she demanded incredulously.

He stared at her. "Why, certainly. Look at the men. For the first time since they found out what ship this was they're smiling!"

"But that's ridiculous! Those stones are worth a fortune! More money than you'll make if you work for that moth eaten foundation for the rest of your life!"

Her husband could not help noticing that in her anger her own eyes blazed as blue as the eyes of Erik's wife. He was also beginning to see things in Velma that he had overlooked in the flush of infatuation.

"In the first place," he told her, "The eyes belong to the ship; the ship belongs to the foundation. In the second place, it was Stoneberg who found them, not I. So in neither case can I claim ownership."

She noted the bitterness in his voice and changed her tactics. "But Tom, think how well they would look on me! I do love you, but after all I have my vanity, too, and we'll never be able to afford anything so beautiful on your salary."

Her wheedling tone only served to anger him. "So you'd be willing for me to steal so your vanity could be satisfied!"

He shoved past her and walked stiffly to the deck. The men were all staring at him in silent approval and in some small measure that made up for the ache in his heart.

TOM found the captain directing the placing of rollers under the keel. Sorenson pretended not to have heard

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the exchange between him and Velma.

"We'll have her afloat by tomorrow afternoon," he informed Tom. "As it looks now I'd say you won't have any trouble finding men to help sail her back. In fact, I think they'd *rather* ship back on her."

That afternoon the storm sprang on them with a sudden ferocity that gave them no chance to defend against it. From out of a clear blue sky it whirled, to rip their tents and carry them away with it.

It left them huddling behind whatever shelter they could find, soaked to the skin and battling to keep their feet against the surf which pounded ever higher on the beach. In the darkness they could not see even the men who were next to them and only an occasional flash of lightning lit the awesome scene.

And then, as suddenly as it had come, the storm was gone. And with it the Narvik! Here and there a bit of wreckage floated over the reefs on which it had been smashed.

Sorenson's head was bowed in grief. He had been master of the Narvik since her christening and had it been a child he had lost he could not have been sadder.

But the Smiling Wife was afloat! Easily, she bounced on the incoming rollers, her deck washed clean by the pounding rain that the storm had brought with it!

There was a strange feeling in Tom's heart as he watched the little Viking craft bob in the surf. That she had survived at all was a miracle, but even more than that he sensed that the ship was alive! As though happy to be released from her long entombment she rode the surf with a buoyancy that was unbelievable.

And Erik's wife was smiling! At first Tom could not believe his eyes. But there was no doubt of it! The expression had changed and the corners of her mouth turned up where they had turned down before!

Only Velma was unimpressed. There was a sneer on her red mouth as she watched the men exclaim over the transformation.

"Like children," she muttered to Tom, to whom she had huddled close in her fear of the elements.

"But it's true!" he said. "You can see for yourself that her expression has changed. Do you doubt your own eyes?"

"Oh, you're as bad as the rest of them," she snapped. "The storm probably washed off some paint that had made a couple of sad lines in her face and you're ready to believe in miracles!"

Sorenson had come up during the exchange and he stood staring at Velma.

"But it is a miracle!" he exclaimed. "Do you think that anything else could have kept that frail ship from being pounded to bits during the storm?"

When she did not reply the captain turned to Tom. "We'll have to decide what to do," he said. "This little uncharted island is way off the sea lanes and without a radio there's no chance that we'd be picked up."

"I don't think there's any doubt as to what we should do," Tom told him. "If the men are willing I'm certain the Smiling Wife can get us back safely."

THE captain looked pleased. "No question that the men are willing. I think we ought to get started at once. We've enough food and water to last us several days and if we don't make land by then we'll surely be in a lane where we can get help from a passing ship."

Velma was aghast. "Do you mean we're going to have to go back in that

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little rowboat?" she demanded.

"Why not?" Tom asked. "If she rode out that storm she's seaworthy enough to sail us around the world!"

"If you think I'm going to get on that old tub you're crazy!" his wife told him.

"It's either that or rot here. We'll certainly have a better chance on the Smiling Wife than we would waiting here until our food ran out and we starved to death."

The crew was already at work gathering up all the supplies from the beach over which they had been scattered by the storm. With the stoicism which the sea breeds in men they had accepted the loss of their own ship and belongings as an act of fate. They would waste no time in railing against the inevitable.

It was evening when the captain steered the Smiling Wife through the reefs and headed her north.

"At this time of the year I figure the wind will be more in our favor if we head for the Indies than if we try for South America although that's closer," he explained to Tom.

"From the way she rides I'd say we wouldn't have any trouble taking her around the Horn if we wanted to," he answered.

If Tom had expected further trouble from his wife he was surprised. She was silent now, something seeming to weigh on her mind. On the second day her attitude changed for the better and she showed flashes of good humor. Apparently she had resigned herself to the voyage and the Smiling Wife gave no reason for uneasiness.

It was that night that Larsen, on watch, thought he heard someone slither past him. A low blanket of clouds hid the moon and the blackness was almost absolute. The men had rigged up a sea rope from the prow to the stern and for a moment the mate felt it grow taut as he touched his hand to it. It slackened immediately, however, and he thought no more of it.

BY MORNING of the third day the clouds had lifted, but the steady breeze which had lifted the Smiling Wife forward with it had gone, too. In its place there was a brooding calm.

The ship drifted idly, and the tropical sun which beat down upon its deck was reflected in shimmering waves of heat. Captain Sorenson held a worried conference with Tom.

"This looks very bad," he said. "We're drifting back in the same direction we came."

"I didn't know that," Tom told him. "Isn't that unusual?"

"It would be ordinarily but I think that this time we happen to have lit in one of the ocean currents. What's worse than that, though, is the heat. Even on our short water rations we won't be able to hold out for long."

"I still don't see any cause for concern," Tom said. "If we get a break and the calm lifts we'll be safe enough."

Sorenson shook his head. "I've seen these calms before. There's no telling how long it will last. And what comes after . . . may be even worse." His voice dropped.

"Have you noticed how strangely the men are acting, too?" Tom asked. "I should have thought that they were too long at sea to let one bad day affect them like this."

"It isn't the calm that's affected them, it's the ship they're on. I've got to admit that even I have noticed a difference in her. There is a heaviness where there used to be such buoyancy."

Tom tried to be cheerful. "A bit of breeze will remedy that, too." Secretly he was not so sure. There was a foreboding in his heart.

The calm persisted through the next

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two days and the men were beginning to show the effects of the heat. They had cut down the water to a cupful apiece and only Velma got more. She lay all day unmoving under an awning that Tom had rigged up for her out of a bit of canvas. To every attempt he made to engage her in conversation she returned a cold silence.

The fourth day was the worst. If anything, the heat increased and the lookouts were changed every hour. It was just when the sun was at its zenith that Anders, a short, dark Swede, was sent up. He had taken to talking to the ship as though it were alive and Sorenson wanted to keep him away from the other men as much as possible.

The men watched Anders climb slowly up to the little platform on the prow. Everyone's movements were now characterized by a lassitude and they turned only their eyes.

The sailor bent over to pat the head and leaned around to speak to it. Suddenly the air was rent by his shriek. For a brief second he stood still and then he turned and ran down the walk to the deck.

"Gone!" he croaked. "Gone! Her eyes are gone!"

Thinking Anders had gone completely mad Tom grabbed him. The sailor made no attempt to get away. He stared up at Tom with red rimmed eyes and repeated sadly over and over:

"They're gone. Her eyes are gone and we'll all die. We'll all die. We'll all die."

At last Tom got the import of his words. Releasing his hold on Anders he ran up the walk to the prow and leaned over the figure of Erik's wife.

Her eyes were gone! And she no longer smiled! Instead her face was fixed in the same sorrowful lines in which they had first seen it.

TOM made his way down drunkenly. Much as he himself had never taken the story too seriously and had inclined to Velma's view he had felt with the men that there had been some mysterious change when he put the eyes in. Now he was convinced.

Sorenson gave him a bleak stare as he passed him. Tom nodded in answer to the unspoken question in the captain's eyes but did not stop to talk. He went on and dropped beside his wife.

"Well?" she asked.

He shook his head glumly. "They're gone all right. And whether you believe it or not, Erik's wife is sad."

"I don't believe any such nonsense," she told him flatly. "Maybe the eyes are gone but I won't believe that that had anything to do with our being becalmed!"

"It doesn't matter now what you believe! The only thing—"

The sound of a scuffle on the deck behind them cut Tom short. He whirled around just in time to see Anders break away from Larsen. The mate had apparently been holding the little Swede down on the deck. As Tom and Velma stared in horror Anders rolled away and got to his feet.

Before any of the men could grab him he had rushed to the rail and in a single leap he was over the side!

Tom had his shoes off in an instant and was already poised on the rail to go after him when the mate seized him.

"No use!" he panted. "Look!"

Tom looked once and then averted his eyes. From all sides fins were converging on the sailor as he floundered in the water. There came a shriek and then another and then a furious boiling and commotion in the water as the sharks fought over the body!

Sorenson had come up and he stared at Tom. There was stark fear in the captain's eyes.

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"I was afraid this would happen," he said. "If we don't get a breeze soon we'll all be dead."

Tom did not answer. Slowly he put his shoes back on for the deck was burning his feet. His brief exertion had drained most of the little strength he had left.

But worse was yet to come. A few minutes later Tom saw the men gathered in a knot near the wheel. They seemed to be in earnest discussion. As he watched, three of the men detached themselves from the group and came toward him and Velma.

It was evidently a committee. In the lead was Stoneberg and behind him came two big sailors. There was a purposefulness in their slow approach that tightened Tom's throat. He watched them come on until they were only a couple of feet away.

"Well," he asked, "What is it?"

Stoneberg answered. "You know what it is! We want the eyes!"

It was the last thing Tom had expected. His eyes widened. "What do you mean, the eyes?"

"You know what we mean! Someone stole those eyes and we think it was you or your wife. None of the men would take them and neither would the captain or Larsen . . . and they didn't fall out by themselves! That leaves you and your wife!"

"You know I wouldn't take them!" Tom told him. He got to his feet.

"No, we didn't really think that *you* did," Stoneberg replied slowly.

TOM caught the significance of Stoneberg's statement and took a step sideways to get directly in front of his wife.

"My wife hasn't been out of my sight since we came on board. It's impossible"

"It's not impossible! She's the only one aboard who doesn't believe in Erik's wife! She's the only one who would take them. She didn't want you to put them back where they belonged in the first place. Now she must give them back!"

Tom looked down at Velma. "Tell them you didn't take them," he begged.

She sneered. "They won't believe me anyway!" But her own blue eyes remained fixed on the deck.

The men took a threatening step forward and Tom tried to hold them off. The two big sailors behind Stoneberg grabbed him. In a flash they had whirled him about and pinioned his arms behind him. One of them dragged him back while Stoneberg and the other pulled Velma to her feet.

"Where are they?" Stoneberg demanded.

Velma bit her lip but kept her eyes fixed on the deck. Stoneberg's voice grew bleak with furry. "Where are they?"

He was beside himself with fear and rage now. Hardly aware what he was saying he began to shout at her. She tried to retreat but there was no place to go. Tom watched horrified as the sailor caught her by the hair.

"You're hiding them!" he yelled. With a rip he tore her dress half off her shoulders. But she remained stubborn, biting her lips to hold back any admission.

Suddenly she moved. With a wrench she tore herself from the sailor's grasp and dodged around him.

"I'll never give them up!" she shrieked. She ran toward the rail and as she ran her hand darted toward her bosom. It came out holding the sapphires.

While the men watched horrified she flung them overboard! The light of madness was in her eyes as she shrieked at them.

"If I can't have them nobody will

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have them! Now you'll never get them back!"

Velma was laughing wildly. "Why don't you jump in after them?" she yelled at her husband. "You love Erik's wife more than you love me anyway!"

No one had moved. There was a hopelessness in the way they stood and looked at her. Their last chance was gone!

As in a dream Tom heard Captain Sorenson shouting. Slowly he took his eyes from Velma and turned toward the captain.

"Hurricane!" Sorenson yelled. The captain pointed to the south and Tom looked up.

At incredible speed a blackness raced toward the tiny ship. The hush over the sea was brooding but expectant now. And then there was sound!

It began with a faint whispering murmuring that grew in volume until it rent the air about the ship in a crescendoing shriek. The water was still no longer but there were as yet no waves, only a wall of water on which the frail craft was lifted.

And then the storm struck in its full fury. Everyone had flung himself to the deck to seize any object that was firmly attached to it but Tom saw at least one man swept away before the blackness became too intense to see any longer.

Wave after wave now lashed the ship and Tom wondered how much longer it would keep afloat. But the Vikings had built well and nothing gave except the mast, which was torn out whole and tossed overboard as though it were a matchstick.

Tom could hear Velma laughing above the roar of the hurricane. She was holding tight to a ring in the deck and as each succeeding wave washed over her and then receded, her laughter rose again.

At last they were in the center of the hurricane and there was a short respite for the Smiling Wife and the men on her. But there was no hope in any of them.

IN THE unearthly glow and silence Velma's laughter sounded higher and higher. But the laughter was tinged with fear now and punctuated with words which Tom could not hear clearly. He wormed his way closer to his wife.

"I did it!" she was shouting. "I did it and now we'll all die!"

She rose to her feet suddenly and started forward. She was running now, up the walk from the deck to the prow. Tom saw her reach the figurehead and throw her arms about it.

He started to get up, bruised and battered as he was, but the darkness had come again and with it the wind. Velma was lost in the gloom and the first wave battered him to the deck again.

He found the ringbolt that had saved him before and held on for dear life. The roar of the hurricane mounted again and went ever higher until it was a physical force even stronger than the mountains of water that hurled themselves against the Smiling Wife.

And then at once there was a lift! A sudden buoyancy that made the ship ride higher on the crest of each succeeding wave, scooped it more swiftly from each succeeding trough!

At first Tom thought that it was some delirium that made it seem that way, for the fury of the hurricane was unabated. The roar was still about them and the waves had not grown any smaller.

Slowly the realization came to him that he was still sane, that the ship was really riding higher. And on the heels of that realization there was a lessening

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of the tension about the ship.

Somehow, Tom knew that the Smiling Wife was going to pull through! As the feeling heightened the storm abated. But was it real?

All around the viking ship the waves were as mountainous as ever and the roar if anything had risen in pitch. But the ship itself appeared to ride in an area of greater calm!

And then the hurricane was gone! As suddenly as it had come upon them it was gone!

The blackness was replaced by light and the sea grew calm. From behind them a breeze blew steadily, pushing the sailess ship forward at a steady pace.

One by one the men picked themselves up from the deck where they had clung so tightly. Tom could see that several were gone. Wearily he counted them. There were only ten left.

He stared up at the prow, knowing that there would be no one there.

But he was wrong! Her clothes torn completely from her by the gale, hair streaming down her shoulders in a sodden mass, arms flung in a death embrace around the figurehead on the prow, his wife stood!

Even as he watched, Velma's body relaxed and she slid slowly down, to lie in a crumpled heap on the platform. Captain Sorenson ran up the walk toward her and Tom followed on his heels.

It was the captain who reached her first. He knelt beside her and turned her over so she lay face upward. Tom recoiled in horror.

Her eyes were gone!

Sorenson rose to his feet and leaned forward to gaze around the prow at Erik's wife. When he turned back he could read the question in Tom's eyes. The captain nodded slowly and pushed his way past Tom as he went back down the walk.

The men were waiting for Sorenson as he reached the deck. No one spoke as the captain looked back up at the pitiful figure of the man on the prow who stood beside the body of his wife.

When the captain spoke his voice was low and haunted.

"We'll be all right now," he told the men; "Erik's wife is smiling again. She's got her eyes back!"

☆ BONE STUDY ☆

Telling Man's History—Past and Present

By CHARLES REEVES

SUPPOSE for a moment that you are a police officer searching through the ruins of a burned house in which you believe a murder was committed. Among the debris you find a portion of charred bone and upon this clue you may have to base the successful completion of your assignment. To the layman, this isn't much to work on, but as a policeman you know that many crimes have been solved from just such a fragment as you have in your hand. Therefore, the first move that you make is to contact the nearest university which has a department of Anthropology and arrange for a series of tests to be run as soon as possible. To most people, Anthropology is the dry study of Apes and Man, but to a law enforcement bureau it is an exciting science that has helped crack many a case. Hardly a week goes by in any large university but what just such things as you need to know are scientifically deduced from the same type of material as you have in your possession. By various tests on this bone fragment, an anthropologist can tell you whether or not it was human, and if so, the age and sex. And, if the bone is a large enough part of the skull, he can determine if the victim was Caucasoid, Mongoloid or Negroid plus even the approximate degree of the intelligence of the person. This all sounds rather fantastic, but in the many years that anthropologists have been telling the stories of human ancestors, they have also been helping to make the present world a safer place in which to live.

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The RED DOOR

The knifeblades hung motionless, and yet the goat was cut to ribbons before their very eyes

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by DON WILCOX

It was easy to open the door, and just as easy to walk through it. But nobody had ever come back—alive

CHAPTER I

Levaggo Worries

KING LEVAGGO, the cruel monarch of Askandia, had grown fat from worrying. He had worried about seizing the throne in the first place, and for the past ten years he had worried over keeping it. Today he was worrying more than ever.

He secluded himself in his private study where he could pace the floor unobserved. This room fitted his mood perfectly. The wall paper design was a dense forest with black trees, some growing to the left, some to the right, none straight up. When he paced to

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the left, the trees seemed to push him back. When he paced to the right, more black trunks resisted him. His only relief was to pause in front of the big arched window that looked down on the winding ribbons of mountain highway.

"The devils! Why don't they come? Why don't they at least report? They're loafing. I ought to have them shot!"

All through this month his eager eyes had been watching for the return of six armed men. He had dispatched them on the first day of November to watch all the roads. There would be a reward for the one who committed the secret assassination.

"I ought to have them shot!"

"Save your bullets," said Whiteblock, sauntering into the study. "Relax."

The king glared at Whiteblock and said nothing. This little man was his confidential adviser, and smart. He was a man of many talents, and the king didn't belittle his words. At least not often.

Whiteblock paused at the window and looked at his soiled fingers in the light. He had just finished building an ingenious instrument of death, a job to which he had devoted many months.

"As I told you before," Whiteblock said, "it's very risky to send men out on the road with the order to assassinate your nephew."

"In secret."

"Secret assassinations aren't easy. They require the skill of an artist. Any of those clumsy louts you sent would leave clues that the common people would pick up. Then the Old Lady would find out, and where would you be?"

THE king stared gloomily at the wall paper. He knew where he would be. In the deep forest. Hiding out. For in spite of his power as King of Askandia, the real power belonged to the people. And their champion was that eccentric old character, his own great aunt. She was cross-eyed and homely and old, and had the wildest head of white hair in all Asia Minor, and laughed with a laugh as deep as a barrel. Her name was so long no one ever bothered to remember more than Maria Kagofanzi Dodoplume. Everyone called her the Old Lady.

"I know you'd prefer to have your murders committed away from the palace," Whiteblock said. "No blood on the floor. No suspicions."

"That's right," said the king. "If they could catch him on the way home from the wars, and murder him quietly —by accident—no one would need to know that he was Prince Randall—"

"The rightful heir."

"Shut up."

"Sorry," said Whiteblock. But he wasn't. He knew where the king's sensitive nerves could be struck. A deft stroke here and there. The more the king worried, the more important Whiteblock became. It was a job with rich rewards, being the most intimate adviser to the monarch of Askandia. "As you were saying—"

"No one would need to know it was Randall."

"My theory is, as you know, precisely opposite," said Whiteblock. "Let him come back to the palace, if he will. Let him roam through the halls, through the gardens, through the power plant, into the Arena. Let him know that death awaits anyone who tries to trespass through the Red Door into the vault—"

"You've said all that before."

"I repeat it. Let the Council know that he has been warned. *But make him want to trespass.*"

"And if he doesn't?"

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"He will. That's his nature. He's bold. He'll take the risk. When he does—zinngo!—he's gone!"

"Are you sure?"

"I tell you, the deadly gadget is complete, Levaggo. Relax! Relax!" Whiteblock took his own advice and slipped into the huge green chair in front of the monarch's desk. His diminutive form was dwarfed by the massive furniture. But he was not completely at ease. When his nerves were thus on edge, his high-pitched voice was capable of a savage bark. "Relax, I say. This can't fail. I'll demonstrate it to you."

The king growled something inarticulate. Three times in the past three years his best laid plans to do away with his second cousin, Prince Randall, had gone awry.

Whiteblock waited for a response. His thin dexterous fingers toyed with a cloth kit of small steel tools which he always carried. The king stood silent, angry, staring out at the afternoon sunlight. His bulging shadow across the desk betrayed the nervous twitches of his puffy jowls and his sharp double-pointed beard.

"Are you still worrying about that servant girl's dream?" Whiteblock snapped.

"I didn't like it," the king said, turning to look down into the narrowed eyes of his cocky little adviser. "I didn't like it a bit."

"Just because a servant girl happens to dream of trouble here in the palace—"

He broke off short. A girl's heel-clicks sounded through the adjoining hall. It was the beautiful Sondra, bringing water for the window plants.

"Sondra!" the king barked. "Come here."

Whiteblock raised an eyebrow. "I'll wait by the Red Door. It's ready to deal quick death whenever you want a demonstration. First I though I would try it out on a criminal, or one of the palace musicians," he gave the king a cynical wink, "but I softened and decided to use a goat instead. See you later."

CHAPTER II

Sondra's Dream

WHITEBLOCK looked up at Sondra as she passed him in the doorway. She chose not to see him. As a servant, she squandered no smiles. He shrugged his thin shoulders and walked away.

Sondra moved around the desk to the sunlit windows. Her soft waves of light brown hair caught a glint of copper from the sun.

"Rather late in the day to be watering the plants, don't you think?" the king said hatefully.

"I did not wish to disturb your majesty this morning," Sondra said softly. "You were standing at the window, lost in thought. So I decided to wait."

He turned to block her path. "Sondra, you're a sorceress."

She stopped short. She was afraid of King Levaggo and she rued the night by the great fireplace that she had first spoken of her strange dreams. The less he knew her, the safer she would be. With forced poise she placed the water pitcher on the window shelf and folded her arms.

"I want you to repeat that last dream to me," he said.

"Again?" Her low, calm voice was almost mocking in its contrast to his rasping words. He seemed to be consuming her with his lustful red eyes. "Again?"

"The whole dream. Don't lie to me, now, or I'll hang you."

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"I would never lie to you, your majesty," she said. "I simply dreamed that you were about to tear the month of November from the calendar when a fanfare of trumpets sounded outside the palace. Someone had arrived. It was the son of Randello, the rightful heir—"

"*Rightful!* Why, you damned traitor!" He struck her across the cheek with his open hand. He stood glaring at her, breathing hard. "Go on! Go on!"

She shrank back, her fingers touching her face, her lips trembling.

"I'm sorry, your majesty. You see, that was just the dream. I forgot—"

"Go on. You dreamed that my cousin Randall came here to the palace. Then what?"

"He was on his way back from the war with Japan. Now that it was over, he was coming back for a visit. And so—I can't tell you any more."

"What happened? Give me everything. Don't you dare slight a single detail!"

SONDRA pressed her hand over her eyes. She regained her voice and went on, slowly, evenly.

"You and Whiteblock whispered together. The two of you agreed that Randall must be killed before the tenth anniversary of his father's death. Otherwise—"

"What do you know about the tenth anniversary?"

"But doesn't everyone know? Doesn't the whole kingdom expect the Old Lady to enter the Vaults and read Randello's letter—his message for all people who still love his memory ten years after his death? Doesn't everyone know?"

"All right, all right," the king growled. It annoyed him that all the court gossip could become so commonplace that even the servant girls could dream about it. But there was something about Sondra. Her keenness. Her sure knowledge of matters that he thought were closely guarded secrets. How did she know what he and Whiteblock had been whispering about? "So you've dreamed up some fantasy about Randall being killed. Very funny. I think we can laugh that off and dismiss the whole matter."

"Thank you, your majesy." Sondra picked up the water pitcher and started away.

"Not so fast, young lady. Come back here."

"Very well, your majesty."

"Did you tell me everything?"

She hesitated. "Not quite."

"Set that water pitcher down. It's all absurd." The king began to pace. Now Sondra knew how much her words had disturbed him, and she saw the color of rage filling his face. "Why should you have such a dream? Why should you think that Randall must be killed? Is he a criminal?"

"In my dream you were afraid he would regain the throne," Sondra said simply. "The people would favor him."

Levaggo beat his fists on the desk. He paced back to the window and beat his fists on the sill.

"It's a poison lie. Utterly false. Utterly false." He seized her arms and shook her. "I suppose you've been telling it around. Have you? Have you?"

"I haven't breathed a word, your majesty. Why should I?"

"Tell me the rest."

"You invited him in. You made him believe he was welcome. As a guest. He was very tall and handsome. And very kind, like his father, the late King Randello. I wanted to warn him that he was about to be murdered. But you and Whiteblock—"

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"Don't stop."

"You and Whiteblock had everything planned."

"Shut up!" Levaggo leaped at her. His brutal fingers went for her throat. He was choking the breath out of her. Her arms flailed, she caught the pitcher and dashed the water in his face. He let go, then, and she saw him mopping at his rage-filled cheeks and black beard. Terrorized by her own boldness, she backed away from him, toward the door. He followed her, roaring.

"Go on, tell the rest. Say that we murdered him and I'll hang you."

"I didn't say it."

"You were about to."

"I wasn't."

"Then what?" A glow of savage satisfaction filled his eyes, and he drew out his words as if now he knew. "Ahhh! You dreamed he was killed by accident. That's it! By accident!" He barked with a demand to make her admit it. "By accident! That's how he was killed! Do you hear?"

He was coming toward her again. Then he stopped. The sight of the calendar on the wall caught him. *NOVEMBER*. His puffy white hand reached out, tore the sheet off and crumpled it.

At that moment a fanfare of trumpets sounded from the palace gates. Someone was arriving. Sondra snatched the pitcher and fled.

CHAPTER III

The Red Door Gets a Goat

FROM the palace gates the news spread through the court, through the drawing rooms, the kitchen, the stables, the power plant, and on to the village at the rear of the palace grounds. This was an event. A husky tramp with a whiskered face and ragged clothes was being ushered into the king's palace. Why? Because he claimed he had seen the king's cousin Randall in battle.

Ornamental iron doors swung open, trumpets blared, guards moved briskly, ushering their guest into the king's brightly lighted reception hall.

Sondra and the other servants watched from behind doors, pillars, and chairs.

"What shall we do?" the king whispered to Whiteblock.

"I told you we should have tested this Red Door before. Now we're caught for time," Whiteblock retorted. "You're quite aware, I trust, that this ragged man entering our palace did not come here by mere chance."

"I'll talk with him at once. The Captain of the Guards believes he is a man of some importance."

"The goat is ready," said Whiteblock.

"Not now. Later. During the dinner hour."

Whiteblock shrugged and watched the massive king stride across the Arena floor to be joined by six gold-braided guards at the stairs.

Within a few minutes, history was being made in the reception hall. The whiskered stranger was standing before the king, doing his best to answer all the questions that were being so nervously fired at him. What was known of Randall? Had he proven himself in the battle of the Pacific? Had he fought with the American troops or the British? Was he a fighter, now that he had grown up, or was he a coward?

"Is there any likelihood that he might have been wounded—or killed?"

"Well, the last time I saw him," said the wayfarer, "was the last time I shaved. In India. Several days ago, as you might guess." He laughed, delighted with his own mischief.

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"Then you—you are Randall yourself?" The king's jaw sagged. "Are you? Of course you are. I'd know you anywhere. You've grown up since I saw you. But you're the prince. You'd just as well admit it."

Randall laughed, and his white teeth gleamed. "I'll shave one of these days to be sure." He thrust his hand into the king's, as if meeting him on an equal plane. It was all happening too suddenly. The king hadn't time to collect his wits. His hand went limp. His face went white. Randall, devilishly handsome within his rags and whiskers, strong of face and solid of jaw, was taking him by storm. "How is our kingdom, cousin?"

"Why did you come?" the king uttered weakly.

"To see my father's picture in the south hall. Do you mind? Come along."

ABRUPTLY the prince whirled and started at a brisk stride into the south hall, toward the wide graystone fireplace whose lively blazes seemed to invite him.

To the guards the king snapped an order. "Accompany him. See that he stays in the south hall until I rejoin him. I must attend certain other affairs of state that are more urgent."

Heels clicked, and the gold-braided, white-uniformed guards marched in double file into the south hall, where each took his place to guard all exits.

From pillars, chairs, and doorways, members of the court and servants shifted their positions to keep within view of this bold young wayfarer. Sondra, who had chosen the south hall as a safe place from which to watch the king and the stranger confer, had meant to conceal herself in one of the two large tapestry-covered chairs before the fireplace. She was now caught directly in his line of march. He whirled suddenly to discover her trying to scramble away.

"Hold on. What's this? An eavesdropper?"

He caught her by the hand, and his dark eyes burned at her fiercely, with a hint of a smile. He noted the neatness of her brown hair, her round arms, her trim figure. The simple blue and white servant's uniform had never looked so well on anyone else, he thought, and he wondered how she would look in the jeweled gown of a queen.

The pretty little creature appeared to be frightened, he thought. Could those marks across her cheek mean that someone had cuffed her?

"Let me go. Please."

"What are you trying to get away with?"

"Nothing, sir."

She looked at him with such a curious brightness in her eyes that he tightened his grip on her hand. She started to whisper.

"I must warn you—"

She stopped, looking around at the cluster of court people who were gathering around at a discreet distance.

"What are you saying?"

"Later. They mustn't hear. Just—be careful!" Her lips trembled a little.

Randall, struck by her beauty as much as by her mysterious manner, put her at arm's length and pointed at her accusingly. "Secrets, eh? Do you see that picture of my father?" He pointed to the huge gold-framed portrait of Randello that hung above the fireplace mantle. "My father has his eyes on you, young lady. He has sharp eyes. I should know. He never missed any of my mischief when I was a boy. I could tell you stories about his scientific experiments—"

A stern cough from one of the court

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dignitaries cut his reminiscences short. Everyone was glaring much too fiercely at him, he thought. Perhaps they were embarrassed. It was not what they expected of a prince's return, that he should so suddenly be deserted by the king and left to converse with a servant girl. But no one knew what to do. He took matters in his own hands. He gave a gesture that took the whole group of twenty or more starchily dressed persons who had gathered around.

"So all of you want to watch me pay respects to my father? That's very interesting." A hint of sarcasm was in his voice as he saluted the portrait. "Father, the court stands here to pay its respects. I only wish you could take a bow. You were a great king. And kind. And never once dishonest, or treacherous or grasping. Take a bow, Father."

ALL the whispering in the south hall ceased. Those courtiers who played their loyalties to King Levaggo in exchange for his favors were stung by this act of sincere devotion to the memory of Randello.

Sondra broke the silence.

"I knew your father very well," she said. "He was a great king."

"A great king and a great man," Randall smiled at Sondra. "Thank you for your kind words, young lady. I'll see you after I shave—if these guards will let me shave."

Meanwhile, King Levaggo made haste to examine the mysteries of Whiteblock's latest and most treacherous invention.

The king, unattended, had hurried down the steps to the Arena. It was a wide, barn-like room, roofed over with skylights. Its walls were banked with tiers of seats to accommodate the largest crowds that ever gathered in the mountains of Askandia. American visitors to the palace had remarked that this level floor was spacious enough for football games or a rodeo. King Levaggo knew that the next crowd that gathered here would come expecting to hear the Old Lady read a message that had lain, for the past ten years, in a chest in the Vault.

Randello had constructed the Vault shortly before his death. He had blasted the rocky mountainside at the rear of the Arena, and walled the room with steel, so that there was only one entrance—the twenty stone steps in the east end of the Arena, and the Red Door at the top of those steps.

Until a few weeks ago, the Red Door had been closed. The plates of steel that Randello had placed across it had not been moved—not until Whiteblock had at last won the right to have them removed.

Now Whiteblock stood at the foot of the twenty steps, with hands on hips, head lifted. He was watching the carpenters remove the last of the scaffolding around the rebuilt doorway. At the left of the stairs, a white mountain goat was tied to the carpenters' workbench.

"All right," said the king. "We haven't much time. Dismiss those fellows and show me what you've done."

Whiteblock was ready. Everything went like clockwork. The carpenters went out. Six members of the Council walked in. All of the numerous Arena doors were closed at the touch of a button. This was a strictly private party, and when the doors were closed, Levaggo and Whiteblock were satisfied that no one in the world would know what happened here—no one but themselves, their six confidential yes-men, and the goat.

Strictly speaking, the goat would be the only one to know the sensation of what was about to happen. But if the experiment worked — and Whiteblock

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was sure it would—the goat would never blat the secret.

"We'd better have a janitor before we start," said the king. Two or three of his Council members echoed, "Yes, a janitor."

"What do we want with a janitor?" said Whiteblock. The Council members looked to the king for an answer.

"Those knives you've hung in the doorway," said the king, "make a pretty design. But if you have some scheme for making them whirl when the goat goes through, you should be prepared to take care of the blood. And the flesh. We don't want goat hamburger sprayed all over the door."

Whiteblock gave a cocky toss of the head. "I will personally mop up any part of that doorway that needs cleaning after the goat goes through."

"You will? With your handkerchief?"

"With the white silk shirt you gave me for my birthday. And another thing. If you see those knives move in any way to threaten the life of the goat, I'll tear them down and cut them into medals for your guards. Are you ready?"

THE king studied the sight before him. The Red Door was much redder than before. The steel plate that had closed this entrance for the past ten years had been red with paint. The new open doorway was deep red with a blaze of concealed lights. The full arch above the twenty steps was marked with two bold concentric circles of glowing red. A curved steel V reached down from the top of the arch. Its point, precisely at the center of the circular arch, exactly seven feet above the level of the top step, held the axle to which the two seven-foot knives were attached.

The knives stood out horizontally, like a two-bladed propeller. Apparently, the knives were intended to rotate like a propeller. They were wide, flat glistening blades, curved slightly like two immense scimitars. A vertical slit in the edge of the V that suported them seemed intended for them to swing through when they spun into motion. But, as Whiteblock had observed, no motion whatever was apparent. They appeared to be set, frozen in a horizontal balance, two dangerous outspread arms guarding the doorway.

But if they did not move, wherein lay the danger? A giant of six and a half feet could walk under them without scraping his head.

"Watch close," said Whiteblock. He led the goat up the steps.

With a steel tool he gave the goat a sharp jab just before they reached the twentieth step. The goat bleated and ran hard. Over the twentieth step. Across the stone platform into the doorway. Running hard. Under the arch—

The king thought the knifeblades trembled just a trifle, yet certainly they remained rigid, horizontal, motionless. But the goat, rushing beneath, was being magically *sliced into nothing*.

Apparently not being touched by anything, yet somehow being sliced. The king went tense, and his eyes bugged.

Sliced like cheese—no, like paper—no, like film. So thin were the slices, so rapid in succession, that to the king's bleary eyes there was no answer. At once it was all over. *The goat had run through, and there was no more goat.*

The slices? They seemed to have disappeared in the same instant that they were cut. The king ran up the steps to see.

"Come back!" the Council members shouted.

But Whiteblock was on the twentieth step, ready to catch the king and hold

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him back at a safe distance. It was an unnecessary precaution. The king gazed through the Red Door into the darkness of the vault beyond. There were no slices of any goatly protoplasm on the stone floor.

Whiteblock sniffed the air. "Not even a smell left."

"Obliterated," said the king.

"A journey from which there is no return," said Whiteblock.

The king jogged down the steps thoughtfully, and faced his six Councilmen. "Gentlemen, it works."

The six yes-men bowed and murmured, "It works, your majesty."

CHAPTER IV

The Old Lady Smells a Storm

KING LEVAGGO glanced back. The slightest hum had played upon his ears during the recent minutes, like an electric fan. He wondered. He saw the twinkle of satisfaction in the eyes of his cocky little adviser, watching the mystified faces of the six Councilmen.

"Don't worry about it, men," Whiteblock quipped. "Everything's under control. But just remember, don't yield to the temptation to walk into the Vault, even if those blades do appear to be stationary."

"We won't," the Councilmen said.

"Don't forget. If you do, you'll be a sliced goat."

"I'll give the decree to the court at once," said the king, swelling with authority. "No one will dare defy *this* order—not even the Old Lady."

"Not anybody—except some dashing young hothead prince."

The king chuckled evilly and the six Councilmen chuckled in the same key.

"Tonight," said the king.

"Tonight," said the Councilmen under their breath.

It was a wonderful banquet, as everyone agreed. The moment the king appeared, dressed in one of his finest green and white dinner suits, fairly bursting with cordiality and good fellowship, the whole court knew that he had decided to welcome the returned prince with open arms.

In the presence of all the dinner guests the king rose and pronounced his official greetings.

"Randall, my own cousin! This is indeed a historic moment. We are honored. Indeed, indeed."

Randall raised his eyebrows in frank surprise at this change of mood. "Indeed? Well, thank you."

"Forgive us, Randall, if we were slow to recognize you in your—your travelling costume."

"My rags and whiskers!" Randall laughed. "I'm surprised you let me in. A few miles down the road I ran across some of your subjects in rags and whiskers who had been beaten within an inch of their lives."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed. I think they had been unable to pay their taxes and so your guards had used clubs—"

"Ah-ah-ah! How unfortunate," said the king, suddenly reddening. "Some stupid guards are always taking matters in their own hands."

"These people declared it was a very common practice. King's orders, they said." Randall faced the king coolly.

"What an unpleasant lie. Let's not mar this festive occasion with anything disagreeable." The king gave a generous wave to all the lords and ladies around the tables. "Come, let us feast. A feast in honor of our prince!"

EVERYONE stole glances at the returned prince during the feasting hours that followed. He was unques-

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tionably a dashing figure, very handsome in the black and gold uniform the court had furnished him. His eyes were deep, his features clean cut, his teeth gleaming with a bold smile. He tossed some rather roughshod remarks into the ring of conversation—some quips that might have stuck as insults if the mood had been less gay. It was obvious that he had a line on the king's cruel treatment of the lower class Askandians.

Two events occurred during the feast, one of them causing everyone to sit up and take notice, the other passing almost entirely unnoticed.

The first was an announcement by Whiteblock, speaking for the king.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the court," Whiteblock boomed into the microphone, "and subjects of Askandia, wherever you are, please give me your attention. The king has asked me to announce an important decree.

"As you all realize, the tenth anniversary of the death of our late King Randello is at hand. This week we observe that anniversary by reading the documents which have been preserved in the Vault. During all these years the Vault has been closed. At last it has been opened."

Low whispers of excitement greeted this announcement. Whiteblock went on.

"This week our honored Maria Dodoplume, whom we affectionately call the Old Lady will carry out Randello's will. She will read documents from the Vault. For this reason, the Vault has at last been opened, and it will remain open until after this event.

"Needless to say, it will be guarded constantly. From early dawn until the palace curfew, guards will be stationed in sufficient number to make sure that no group of bandits or other parties, however bold, will have any chance to enter.

"The king regrets that it is necessary to take such measures. But a king can never know which of his citizens might take it into his head to steal into the Vault for an advance reading of these documents. Do you not agree?"

Many heads nodded in the affirmative, and there were whispered yeses throughout the banquet hall. Whiteblock drew himself up for the master stroke.

"Therefore your king does decree—and I read his own words from this sheaf—'that instantaneous death shall strike anyone who shall ascent the twenty steps at the east end of the Arena and thereupon cross into the Red Door that leads to the Vault. Only by the king's special permission may this way be made open to any of his subjects, whether they be lords and ladies or the humblest servants. Do you understand my reading?"

A chorus of "Yes! Yes!"

"The decree is in operation from this moment," said the confidential advisor, waving the blank paper from which he had pretended to read. "The king signs it in your presence."

The king, slipping a sly nudge to Whiteblock, signed the blank paper with a great flourish of his pen, and Whiteblock bowed and took the document away. Everyone applauded, and the prince beamed to show that this action had his fullest approval.

"Excuse me for a moment, please," said the king to the prince. "I must make sure that Whiteblock's broadcast reached out to all my subjects."

THE dinner guests were left to themselves. The king hurried away. Out of hearing of their excited talk, he hurried down to the Arena. He opened a door and walked in, crossed the wide floor and came to the twenty steps. He

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paused. There were no guards stationed here as yet. Very dangerous. He must attend to this at once.

Dangerous?

Why was it dangerous?

The king scowled. Why hadn't that devilish little Whiteblock explained the principle of this deadly magic?

The king walked up the steps slowly, his eyes on those level, silent, motionless knifeblades. There was a slight hum from somewhere in that vicinity, and the faintest smell of the heat of an electric motor.

The king reached the twentieth step. He drew the sword from its scabbard —the gold handled sword that had been a gift from a maharajah—which he always wore at formal dinners. He raised it slowly, cautiously. It pointed toward the vertical plane in which the blades *would* whirl— *if they whirled.*

The point of the sword, apparently touching nothing but air, *reached that plane.*

Vlnnk!

The sword barely jerked in his hand. Something invisible had struck it. Struck it with the force of lightning. Instantly he drew it back, to see whether it had been scratched.

The point was gone. Two full inches of the end had vanished.

Were his eyes mocking him, or had he seen a score of tiny slices of steel melting into the air almost instantaneously?

"Not bad," he muttered to himself. "Whatever the damned thing is, it's ready."

He hurried back to the dinner table, and quelled his trembling nerves.

"Ah, Prince Randall, how is the feasting? Be sure to eat aplenty. You never know how long it may be until your next meal. Ha-ha."

"Thank you, Levaggo," said Randall. "The service is excellent. And here comes another helping."

It was Sondra who refilled his plate. "Eat heartily, gallant prince. You never know whether there'll be another meal."

He caught the message of warning again in her eyes. The king's ugly glare caused her to hurry on.

The second event of the feast, which went almost unnoticed, was a whispered message which fell disturbingly upon the king's ear.

"The Old Lady wants to know if it is true."

THE king looked up abruptly into the patient old face of Sebastian, one of the Old Lady's servants. The white haired man's lazy eyes were half closed, as usual. The king never saw him without wanting to kick him, just to wake him up. But strangely, the Old Lady had kept him all these years as her most reliable messenger.

"If what's true?" the king growled.

"If the Vault is being left open."

"Sure it's true, and death to all trespassers. Can't she tell an official decree when she hears it on the radio?"

"Thank you," said Sabastian. "I'll reassure her." And he started off.

"Wait a minute," said the king. His eyes narrowed with a glint of murder. "I want you to take a private message back to her. Private. No one is to know. Here, I'll whisper it . . . There are no guards on duty at the Red Door yet. You have my secret permission to walk in. I want you to see whether this key will work in the small iron chest just inside the Red Door. Do you understand? Then go try it at once. Report to the Old Lady if the key works. If it doesn't work, bring it back to me."

"Yes, your majesty." Sebastian trudged away, not knowing that he had been given a spare key to one of the

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royal garages.

Very soon the king again excused himself, and this time he was gone for an interval of about fifteen minutes.

"Is the king not well?" the prince asked one of the ladies across the table.

"Of course he's well. Just slightly nervous. He's always that way. The affairs of state are always on his mind, you know."

"It must be very uncomfortable to be a king," the prince observed. "But if I were king, I'll swear I'd manage to sit through a feast like this without being interrupted. Oh, here he comes. What now, Levaggo? Is everything under control?"

The king was white and perspiring, but gay—so very gay that the prince thought he was outdoing himself for the sake of appearances.

"Is something wrong, Lavaggo?"

"Nothing's wrong," said the king. "Everything's fine. Everything's fine. What was that story you were telling about the war? You walked in front of a cannon or something?"

"It's a very dull story," said the prince. "I'll repeat it some other time."

"There might not be another time," someone whispered over his shoulder. The soft voice of Sondra, serving him olives and throwing him another warning look for good measure.

The feast of welcome lasted until midnight. The pleasing personality of the returned prince was taking a hold upon the court. They liked his stories. They liked his laughter. They were mystified by the hints of certain adventures in the war that he did not care to relate in full.

But Prince Randall was no braggart when it came to his own achievements. His own modesty was in high contrast to the bluster of King Levaggo and some of the Council members.

During the final course, after the king had observed that it was growing late and all good things must come to an end, Randall announced his own plan briefly.

"Of course I shall be glad to stay for a day or two—until the Old Lady reads from the Vault. But please do not bother to provide a bed for me. I'm not in the mood for sleep. I would prefer to spend the night by the fireplace—alone."

THE court dignitaries shook their heads skeptically. We he suspicious of the king's hospitality? His gaze came to rest on Sondra, standing in the doorway beyond. She was talking to him with her eyes again, nodding her approval of what he had said. He must know it would be dangerous for him to sleep in this palace.

"Prince Randall's wish shall be granted," said the king. "He may sit by the fire and admire the portrait of his father all night if that is what he prefers."

An hour later the palace was quiet. Nearly everyone had retired. Randall sat gazing into the low flickering coals. The king bade him goodnight.

"One moment," said Randall. "I have a very personal question to ask."

"Huh?"

"Was it my father's wish that you take over the throne? I'm entitled to an official statement, you know."

The king gave a laugh that was heavy with irritation. "Such a simple question. How old are you, cousin? I took you to be mature. You must know that such matters are always properly executed by the members of the Council." He pointed to the east wall, where a series of entrances opened the way to the Arena. Through the largest arch, the whole stretch of dark Arena floor could be seen, and beyond it, in the dark distance, the twenty steps leading up

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to the glowing Red Door. "Can you see the Red Door through that arch?"

"What about it?" said Randall.

"Do you remember when your father constructed the Vault beyond?"

"I was away most of the time," said Randall, "attending school in India."

"Within that Vault are the official documents of your father's will."

"I am entitled to read them," said Randall.

"I hope you will stay to hear the Old Lady read them."

"I wish to go in and see them tonight. This very hour, if you please." Randall rose and motioned for the king to accompany him.

"No, Randall. You can't do it."

"Why can't I?"

"Because everyone is strictly forbidden, upon the pain of death. Didn't you hear Whiteblock read my decree? That applies to everyone." The king mopped perspiration from his white forehead. "No person, whether servant, or Councilman, or prince may enter the Red Door. I have placed balanced scimitars in the arch as a reminder. The punishment is death."

"Cousin Levaggo, I have traveled eight thousand miles."

"But you would not disobey your father's order."

"Wouldn't I?"

"Of course you wouldn't."

The prince looked at the king steadily and tried to swallow his anger. He said quietly, "It's not like my father to make such mysterious arrangements."

"I have no more to say. You understand, I trust."

"Yes."

"Good night, then."

"Good night."

DOWN the south wing corridor Whiteblock had been listening to every word. Now the king, having walked the length of the corridor with loud footsteps, slipped back quietly to join him.

"Perfect," Whiteblock whispered. "Perfect. It can't fail. It's even better than you think."

The king mopped the sweat from the edges of his double-pointed black beard. "Better—how?"

"I planted a microphone to carry your conversation to the six Councilmen. They were holding a midnight conference, expecting trouble. Now they've made a recording of your words with the prince. History will know that you gave him full warning."

The king gave a relieved sigh. "Then the worst is over. *If* he goes in—"

"When he goes in, you mean," said Whiteblock eagerly.

"When he goes in and gets sliced by those invisible knives, or what-the-devil-ever they are, you and I will be in the clear. All we have to do now is sit back and wait."

"And relax."

"Relax? That reminds me. Where's Sondra? Do you know whether she retired? She's in danger of warning him. I meant to put her under lock and key for safe keeping."

"You'd better do it yet. I'll keep my watch. S-sh! Someone's coming."

The hard thumping footsteps, with just the slightest limp, were easily recognized. Down the dimly lighted corridor came the Old Lady in a gaudy purple dress and the yellow boots she always wore. The anger in her eyes could be detected instantly. Her wild white hair was in worse disarray than usual. She was muttering to herself.

The king hurried down the hall to intercept her. "Maria! What are you doing up this time of night?"

"I smell a storm," the Old Lady snapped. "I smelt it all the way across the village, and the closer I got to the

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palace the more I smelt it."

"You're dreaming," the king mocked. "There's not a cloud in the sky."

"I smell a storm, and it smells awful thick around here. Where are all your guards? You've sent 'em to bed, huh? You must have wanted to get 'em out of the way."

The king tried to turn her back, and Whiteblock joined him in the effort.

"Go home and go to bed. It's too late to be starting a search," the king said nervously. "Wait till morning. He'll probably turn up."

The Old Lady turned savagely, and her crossed eyes seemed to straighten for a moment. "How did *you* know?

"I don't know a thing," the king growled.

"*I* didn't tell you Sebastian was gone. You must know." The Old Lady's hands tightened into claws. "You've done something with him, that's why."

"You're crazy. You're crazy. You're crazy. You're—" The king broke off his enraged words only because Whiteblock throttled him. The little confidential adviser took matters in his own hands.

"Maria, if you've lost a servant, we'll start a search at once. There. Are you satisfied?"

"You'd better find him and get him back to me safe and sound. This is the first time he's missed his duties since they got him drunk one Saturday night thirty-five years ago. You better find him."

The Old Lady trudged away.

Whiteblock turned to the king. "What this all about. Is Sebastian missing?"

"I don't know," said the king. "I don't even know what she's talking about. She's crazy if she thinks I—"

"Shut up!" Whiteblock cracked, and then added, sarcastically, "Your majesty, I smell a storm."

CHAPTER V

Whiteblock Wants a Medal

WHITEBLOCK had wanted a particular medal for a long time. It was a large white-gold medal set with a circle of fifteen emeralds. It had no official significance, for it had been given to the king by one of the wealthiest noblemen of India simply as an ornament, and a handsome ornament it was. The king wore it tonight to match his green and white dinner suit.

"He'll give it to me tonight," Whiteblock thought.

Twice in the past, when the king had been particularly pleased with Whiteblock's favors, the confidential adviser had been on the verge of requesting this gift. Tonight would be the night. Within the hour. As soon as the prince—

"What's happened to Randall?" the king asked.

"He's still there by the fireplace," said Whiteblock. "He's boasting about his father's portrait again."

"To whom? Not Sondra!"

It was Sondra. She was looking very charming, indeed, and it was quite apparent that she and Randall were falling in love.

"This won't do," the king muttered. "I'll give her the royal order to get to bed." And he forthwith marched across to the fireplace to do so.

In their brief conversation that preceded the king's unwelcome interruption, Randall and Sondra had lost no time getting acquainted.

Randall was certain he had seen her before, somewhere in India. Didn't she and her father interpret dreams on the stage? Sondra, smiling, admitted that this was true. Until her father's death they had been entertainers. But here at the palace of Askandia, no one knew of this except the Old Lady.

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"My dreams," Sondra admitted, "brought me to this palace in the first place. Someday I must go through a terrible explosion of fire—if I wish to be a princess."

"How do you know that?" Randall was on the edge of his chair with curiosity.

"My dreams," Sondra smiled. "I know that if I wish to be a queen someday, I must be a match for the prince who will become my husband. And my dreams tell me that my prince has already gone through fire."

Randall suddenly lifted her to her feet. He held her at half an arm's length, his hands pressing her elbows at her waist. He tried to read the mysterious depths of her eyes.

"You know so many things," he said. "You knew my father during the years that I was away at school. You must have known that he was a learned man—a scientist—and that he and I built the most wonderful laboratory. Did you know these things?"

"At the laboratory I must go through fire," Sondra said, gazing at him with a far-off look in her eyes.

He wanted to kiss her, then, and he would have. But the intrusion of the king prevented. In another moment Sondra retreated, according to the king's orders. Then the king repeated his own good night and trudged off in the other direction.

NOW left to himself, Randall turned and walked toward the nearest arched entrance to the Arena.

"She must know the secrets of those documents already," Randall thought. "Father must have planned . . . Or perhaps the Old Lady has prepared her to share my secret . . . I wonder what Father wrote . . ."

As he crossed the wide Arena floor slowly, certain stimulations played upon his senses. He broke out of his reveries and began to study the Red Door. He could hear a faint hum, as if of a ventilator fan somewhere in the Vault. He must be mistaken. The Vault, he knew, had been hewn out of the solid stone of the mountainside. The faintest odor of warm machinery could be detected.

The lights around the door were all red, and none too bright. They gave the glistening pair of blades, which hung like outspread propellor blades, an ominous reddish-black cast.

He stopped and listened. A large room like the Arena could not help echoing the little sounds of squeaking floorboards. He moved up the steps slowly. On the tenth step he paused, listened.

Then he knew. He was being watched. Not one, or two, but several persons were lurking in the shadows of this room, watching his every move.

He chuckled to himself. "So this whole welcome becomes transparent," he thought. "They are expecting me to walk into death."

On the eighteenth step he paused again, looked up at the blades, and smiled to himself. He could imagine how agitated they must be, how terribly eager, watching and waiting for him to take those last few steps. He kept his eyes on the blades and began to back down the steps.

"I'll play their game," he thought. "I'll work them into a frenzy. Then what will they do with me?"

For a full hour he did play the game, and all the while he knew, from the tiny sounds, that his hidden audience was being worked into a cold sweat.

Sometimes he would climb the stairs briskly, as if fully determined to walk right in. Then he would stop abruptly, and hesitate for minutes, as if debating, finally shaking his head and descending dejectedly. Sometimes he would retreat

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all the way across the Arena floor. Then, as he started out, he would look back, and be tempted all over again.

He knew the king's impatient temperament simply would not be able to endure the waiting, and he was right.

Presently the king was crossing the floor toward him.

"I couldn't sleep, Randall." The king was breathing hard. His fingers were twitching. "I felt that I had done you an injustice."

"How so?"

"By refusing to let you—" the king preferred to whisper. "Why don't you go ahead and break the law? With everyone in bed asleep, why don't you go on in? No one will know."

"You're coaxing me to go in, Cousin Levaggo?"

"For your own piece of mind, yes."

"Very well." Again he mounted the stairs, this time to the twentieth step, and two paces beyond, so that he stood within inches of the deadly doorway. "Why don't you come along, Levaggo?"

"Me? Oh, no. I'll keep watch. You go ahead."

"I'll keep watch," said Randall. "You go."

WITHIN a few minutes, Whiteblock, who saw that the king was in danger of spoiling the whole set-up by his nervous manner, decided to come out of hiding and join the effort.

Within a few more minutes, the whole Council had appeared, quite as if by chance, to add their moral pressure to the campaign. The argument took various turns and twists, and at last Prince Randall sat down on the twentieth step and laughed.

"All right, gentlemen, I am about to enter the Red Door. You've tried so hard, coaxing and cajoling me in every possible way. The least I can do is reward you by walking in and looking over the documents to my heart's content. But I am disappointed that none of you will go in with me."

He looked at the king and Whiteblock, each standing on the nineteenth step, and at the Council, who had arranged themselves on the seventeenth and eighteenth steps.

"But before I walk in, let me tell you something about the blades in the doorway. You would say that they are motionless, wouldn't you, Levaggo?"

"Of course they are. You can see that for yourself."

"No, I can't," Randall said, and smiled with gleaming teeth. Then he grew very serious, like an earnest teacher delivering a lecture. "I would say that they are *rotating at high speed.* I would say that they only appear to be stationary because they are *synchronized with the light.* Do you Councilmen understand what that means?"

From the blank expressions it was quite apparent that the Councilmen understood absolutely nothing.

"I'll explain," said Randall, "for the benefit of you who appear a little more innocent than your friend Whiteblock. The image of any light is retained in your eyes for a split second. That's the reason a light may appear to be a constant glow when actually it is a rapid series of flickers. From the stationary appearance of those steel arms, it's plain to me that we are in the dark more than half the time. But the flashes of light are coming at us fast and regular, and they're timed to catch the knives at the same position on each round. It's a simple principle, Levaggo. Your chauffeur could explain it as well as I. Ask him about the workings of a stroboscope some day and he'll tell you. Do I make myself clear?"

THE king said nothing. He was as white as a chilled chicken. But

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some member of the Council murmured that he didn't understand a thing.

Whiteblock was brazen. "The prince is trying to accuse us of sending him into a wheel of death. He's mistaken, of course."

"Then why are the rest of you afraid to walk through the door?"

"We're not afraid," said Whiteblock. "It's out of respect for the law. If there was any reason to walk through—"

"I'll make it worth your while," said Randall. He lifted the emerald medal off the king's chest like a magician snatching a watch out of a concealed pocket. He slid the object onto the stone floor. It scooted for about three yards and came to rest well inside the Red Door. "Why don't you go in and pick it up?"

"Why don't *you?*" Whiteblock retorted hotly. "Maybe the king would let you have it for a souvenir."

The king nodded. "Indeed, indeed."

"Then it's mine," said Randall. He straightened, drew a deep breath, and strode straight through the doorway. He looked back at the eight gaping spectators. "So it's mine."

He saw that Whiteblock's eyes were flashing fire.

"So it's mine," Randall repeated and he bent down slowly and picked it up.

The king blurted. "The damned thing's not going. Whiteblock! The damned thing—"

"Shut up!" Whiteblock, still eyeing the medal greedily, sprang over the twentieth step and marched into the doorway. "I'll take that—"

His last words. Within a yard of Randall, he was sliced away into nothingness.

Randall stood, gazing back at the open-mouthed members of the Council and the flabbergasted, dumbfounded king. Between himself and them there appeared to be absolutely nothing. There was certainly not one shred of the late Whiteblock.

CHAPTER VI

Descent to the Laboratory

THE king was confined to his bed.

The whole palace was in an uproar. The facts had leaked out through the Council. A deliberately planned murder had gone awry, it appeared, though no one dared say it.

Everyone was speculating over what would happen when the Old Lady took charge of the Randello Tenth Anniversary Memorial Service. Those few members of the court who wished to prove their loyalty to King Levaggo begged her to postpone the service until the king was ready. But others said, "Don't wait for him. He'll play sick all winter, just to keep from facing the facts."

The guards visited him, from time to time; his chauffeur, a lantern-jawed, gangling, bow-legged fellow known as Muggs, paid his respects daily. The cook brought him special dishes, and tasted them in Levaggo's presence to allay any suspicion that they might be filled with poison.

A heavy guard was kept stationed at the Red Door day and night. It was hardly necessary. No one dreamed of trying to enter after what had happened. Muggs, the chauffeur, and some of the mechanics and electricians from the power plant and the village offered to pry into the mysterious door mechanism. But the king forbade it.

So the Red Door continued to hum quietly, and its balanced seven-foot scimitars seemed to stand as motionless within the arch as ever.

But the rumor that Prince Randall had successfully defied this death trap and had walked through it unscathed was a story to spread like wildfire.

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"He's young and handsome, a dashing young soldier back from the wars," the gossiping villagers would say, "and he's in love with that beautiful servant girl, Sondra. She's really some sort of entertainer, and they say she tells your fortune from your dreams."

"Can she defy the Red Door too?" others would ask.

"They say that she wants to. She has a notion that the Old Lady will make Randall the king and Sondra the queen if she can learn to walk through death the way he does."

"But how can she learn?"

"That's something the Old Lady won't tell anyone. I took a plate of cookies to her yesterday and she told me practically everything. All about how grieved she was over losing Sebastian her servant. She's just sure the Red Door got him, and she thinks the king did it. But she wouldn't say a word about the prince and Sondra. Maybe she'll just leave them to their own troubles."

SO THE gossip went. But it sharpened on the morning that an automobile rolled out of the palace grounds before daylight. Sleepy villagers who hurried to their windows were probably too late to see it go, for it shot away at great speed as soon as it was out on the highway.

But if those vigilant villagers lingered at their windows for as much as five minutes, they were rewarded by seeing another car race off in the same direction. "The Old Lady! And she's got a chauffeur! Who do you suppose she's chasing so early in the morning?"

Randall and Sondra did not know they were being followed. They thought they had made a clean getaway.

They wound around the mountains of Askandia until they came to a seemingly forgotten road. Soon they were driving up to the entrance of what might have been a deserted mine.

"There's been a bit of landslide," Randall observed, braking to a stop. "Otherwise we'd be able to drive right in. Are you good for the walk?"

"Lead on," said Sondra.

They climbed over the heap of fallen stones that had threatened to block the doorway, and soon found themselves within a zigzagging tunnel.

The turns were sharp, sharper than right angles, with the switchback effect of mountain roads, all enclosed within walls of rock. Deeper and deeper. The irony blueness of the rocky surfaces added to the feeling of depth. A touch of a switch had turned on a circuit of electric lights, one dim bulb at each turn. Much too dim, Sondra thought. Like something out of her half forgotten dreams. She felt that there were observers lurking around those dark corners. She clung to Randall's hand.

The smells of deeper air. The warmth of the earth's subterranean chambers. Then, to Sondra's relief, signs of civilization. Here was an American army jeep parked in the very center of the passage. They walked around it and hurried on. There were drums of fuel.

"If it's much farther, we might drive," she suggested.

"We're almost there, Sondra. Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

"I'm sure, Randall. Even if I didn't trust my own dreams, even if I didn't trust the Old Lady—and I do, very much—I will still trust you above all people."

He must have liked her answer. His head was high with pride, his eyes were on fire with purpose. He was strong and brave, as a prince should be. But he also had that rare quality that women admire so much in men—a full understanding and appreciation of the

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strength and courage she brought to him.

"What tremendous instruments!" she gasped. As they rounded the corner into a great laboratory chamber, the brighter lights that shone in long parallel bars from the walls revealed a more complicated sight than she could begin to begin to understand.

A few things were familiar—certain instruments of warfare. Fuel barrels. A truck. In a distant corner, a small airplane.

But the great machine in the center of the room, more intricate than her most fanciful dream, was a mystery that she had no words to describe. Around it were immense tubes, like the bodies of dirigibles set up on end, all shining with glossy purple metal, seemingly alive under bars of violet light.

THERE was not a soul here; and yet Sondra felt as if she were in the presence of a thousand master minds, all of whom had fixed themselves into something timeless, through these great monsters of power. Now that Randall had snapped a master switch, instrument boards had lighted along the platforms halfway up the side of the central machine. Generators hummed softly, gadgets came to life with pinpoints of light, immense governors began to spin. Huge glass spheres glowed with colored light, revealing smaller spheres within, and still tinier globes in the center. A flare of sparks played back and forth through their surfaces.

"Are you frightened, Sondra?"

"Do I look frightened?"

"You look fascinated."

"That's it. Not frightened. Not with you."

"Here we are, at the end of the room."

The long subterranean chamber tapered beyond the vast machine, but the end was quite rounded out, with a hollowed-out effect. It was streaked with wierd shadows from the fall of rocks that had been shattered and pulverized, as if from some terrific explosion.

High overhead, Sondra observed, the hollowed-out effect was still more pronounced. The rock seemed to have been eaten away for many yards up into the mountain overhead, so that a black emptiness hung over them.

"It's like a stage," Sondra said. "Somewhere up there the curtains are ready to descend."

"Do you feel that the curtain is about to descend, dear?" He seemed troubled over her comparison. What did he mean? Did he think she was speaking of impending death?

"I didn't mean—I was just comparing it to the first big auditorium I played in back in India," she said. "It was vast, like this, and I didn't know what was going to happen. I mean, there was a big audience out in front, and my father knew I was scared."

"I'm your only audience this time." said Randall. Then looking around apprehensively, he added, "At least, I hope so."

They both stood breathless for a moment, listening. The rustle of sound from the distant tunnel was perhaps nothing more ominous than a tiny landslide of loosened stones.

"I am wishing you luck, Sondra," the prince said. He held her tight for a long moment and kissed her. At last he led her to the wall. "Stand here. Don't move. Just stand."

He walked away from her determinedly. He glanced at his watch. His nerves quickened.

SOME fifty yards from where she stood, there hung a cable with a hook. There were four or five small

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buckets of stones lined along the wall. He climbed up on a bit of ledge and hung one of the weighted buckets on the hook.

It took her a moment to be sure.

Yes, the weight was descending slowly drawing the cable down. Out across the line of crisscrossed cables toward the big machine, she saw three huge rollers, like the cylinders of a printing press, beginning to turn. One very slowly, the second somewhat more rapidly. The third was not only rotating but was riding away from the other two, across the top of the machine. The intricate actions of other parts of the mechanism were partially revealed by the reflected glow of several dull yellow lights along the machine's vast shoulders.

Now all the lights were brightening, and the whole cavern became a place of such intense brilliance that Sondra was nearly forced to close her eyes. Those broken edges of natural rock might have been studded with diamonds.

But the most noticeable and by far the most ominous of all the effects that hanging the weight on the cable had apparently started was the movement of the massive black gun which projected from the very center of the machine.

It was a blunt-nosed cannon. Not more than thirty feet in length, it was so wide of diameter that it might have belched forth a small piano or a jeep.

It had been pointed upward, into the overhead cavern. Now it was slowly descending, black, glistening, frightening, and at last it was pointing directly at Sondra. There it stopped.

There was a moment of breathless silence. The easy whirr of well oiled machines ceased. There was a smell of heat in the air, like train brakes. No movement. No sound.

Sondra looked to Randall. Was this it? Was it happening—whatever it was that must happen? At a distance of several yards he was sitting crouched against the wall, his shoulders drawn tight with tension, his elbows hard against his sides. He nodded to her grimly, as if to say, "Stay right where you are. Don't move. Just wait."

Then suddenly he put his fingers to his ears.

A glow of green sparks rattled over the heaps of machinery. Everything was alive with the crackle of sparks.

Then for one blinding instant the light struck—a flash of fire that was like the end of the universe. That was all. All consciousness ended for Sondra.

CHAPTER VII

The Old Lady Gets an Eyeful

THE Old Lady had followed, all the way to the tunnel entrance, in the company of Muggs, the king's gangling, lantern-jawed chauffeur.

The Old Lady didn't like Muggs. She never had. He was one person she never understood. Partly because he talked with an accent. Too much of the Arabian in his speech. She wouldn't have minded that if he had ever had anything to say. He was too dumb for any use. He wouldn't even argue with her.

"Don't pretend you like these rocky roads," she had grumbled along the way, after he had been driving for miles without saying a word. "You know you don't like them."

"Yes, ma'am," said Muggs. No spirit whatever.

"As a driver, you're about as safe as a monkey," she said.

He gave a nod, as if fully contented to accept her veridct.

"What are you, an idiot?" she

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growled. "Don't you ever get mad?"

He shrugged and concentrated upon the hairpin curve as if doubting that he would make it. She wondered. Maybe it took all his feeble concentration to control the car. Well, anyway she was glad she hadn't driven, herself. Her physician was right, driving was much too strenuous for one of her age, especially in these mountains.

They parked when the half-blocked tunnel entrance stopped them. There was the car they had followed. Its two passengers had evidently wasted no time following the tunnel to whatever destination it might lead to.

"Wait for me right here, Muggs."

"How long?"

"However long it is, you wait," the Old Lady snapped.

"I'll get hungry after awhile."

"Don't tell me!" Well, maybe the fellow did have some spunk after all.

During the next half hour, as she followed down the long zigzag trail, she grew increasingly uneasy about him. Maybe he would wait, maybe he wouldn't. She had taken the car key, but as a chauffeur he undoubtedly carried an extra.

Her worries were cut short when she came in view of the world of underground machinery. The mystery of this place started a chain of wild fancies in her mind. What were these great mechanisms intended to accomplish? She recalled the pictures she had seen of atom bomb factories in America. She knew, as everyone knew, of the limitless destruction that this awful source of power could achieve. She had read, too, that the usefulness of its mysteries had only begun to be explored.

She stopped short and hid back of a pyramid of fuel drums. She could see Sondra and Randall across the room. They were looking back, disturbed by the sound of her footsteps.

NOW they were going on. What would they do? Why was Sondra speaking of a curtain falling? The Old Lady wondered. Did Prince Randall realize how much she had sacrificed, leaving her glamorous career before the footlights to become an humble servant in his palace—all in quest of a beautiful dream?

With what remarkable grace she had borne her burden, the Old Lady thought.

"Why are they talking of death? Of the curtain falling? That rascally prince is giving her riddles—no, he seems deadly serious. Deep down, he's haunted by an awful fear of what may happen. He almost wishes she would back out and not go through with it. Or does he?"

The Old Lady heard his words, "I am wishing you luck."

Then she saw that they were going to kiss, and so she settled back in hiding and closed her eyes so as not to intrude upon their private moment. But the kiss lasted, and she did look, in spite of herself, and her old frame filled with a deep breath of days long gone.

Now she saw Sondra standing, waiting as if for death. She saw Randall walk to the cable and hang a weight on the hook. Machines began to roll slowly. Something was going to happen . . . Brighter, brighter, brighter . . . the glare . . . the sparkle of stones . . . Now quiet . . . deathly silent . . . The smell of heat . . . the sudden noise of crackling sparks . . .

An explosion! A universe full of fire out of the nose of that big stubby cannon!

The girl fell slowly.

Stones showered down from the hollowed-out ceiling. Stones and the dust of stones, puffing like smoke. Down over her prone body. She lay there, covered with the whiteness of it.

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The prince was still holding his ears, but now he raised his head a little. He shifted his position and watched, half crouched on the flat stone, his chin resting in his hands. The Old Lady saw that he was mumbling something to himself. Perhaps counting.

The cloud of dust spread until it was a thin fog throughout the cavern. All the machines had stopped. The cable hook returned to its original position. The weighted bucket dropped to the ground and lay there on its side, still clogged full of rocks. The dust made it a blur of gray.

Now the Old Lady saw that the girl was breathing perceptibly. Randall sprang up and ran over to her. She raised her arm. She was looking up, brushing the dust from her face. "Randall!" she breathed.

He caught her hand. "It's all right, dear. It's all over. You've come through!"

CHAPTER VIII

If Muggs Were Only King—

MUGGS the chauffer lost no time in reporting his position to the king. The little two-way radio set in the car took care of that.

"Yes, your majesty, I'm all alone right now. The Old Lady just left me. We're at some kind of tunnel and she's gone right in . . . Yes, she's right on their heels, but I couldn't say what they're up to . . . Anyway, you've got nothing to worry about. I've got them surrounded."

"Surrounded—*how?*" came Levaggo's impatient bark.

"By a mountain. A great big mountain. It's as big as—"

"Never mind. Exactly where are they?"

"Down in it. Looks to me like the tunnel leads 'way down, like a mine. It's an awful good chance for me to get them on the way out. I can shake a few stones down on 'em. It'll look like an accident."

"No, none of that, Muggs," the king called back savagely. "The people would know. We can't take any more such chances. There's only one thing to do. Let them go ahead. But follow them. Watch them. See what they do. There'll be some sort of laboratory. Maybe a chemical plant. I doubt if the Old Lady herself knows just what. Anyway they're going to try to work some sort of transformation on the girl—"

"What's that?"

"I can't take time to explain. The point is, you've got to *see* it happen. And they mustn't see you."

"Yes. Then what?"

"Then *you've* got to go through the same thing. Do you understand?"

Muggs gulped. "You mean I've got to go throught a *transformation?*"

"That's the only way. I'll tell you why. When the prince and Sondra come back, they think they'll win the right to be king and queen on the grounds of having some special talent —a trick to escape death in a way that other human beings can't."

"That's wonderful," Muggs said tactlessly. He was about to add the comment that if they could escape death, they *should* be made king and queen. But the light of the king's idea began to burst on him. "Oh, you mean if *I* get transformed the same way—"

"Then *you'll* be able to do whatever they do. I wish I were there myself—"

Muggs was suddenly on fire with the idea. "You mean I might even be able to *walk through knifeblades and things?*"

"That's exactly the point. We'll cut the ground right from under Prince

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Randall's feet."

MUGGS began to expand, psychologically speaking, into something he had never dreamed of being. "If I can walk through knifeblades, *what's to prevent me from getting to be king?* What's to prevent folks from saying, 'Muggs, we like you, and you can defy death. You be king awhile!' How about that, Levaggo?"

The king's voice came back in a frozen reprimand. "Address me as Your Majesty, you lout."

"Sure, your majesty, I forgot," said Muggs. He was studying his own reflection in the glass dial of the radio, trying to imagine how he would look in a king's turban or a jeweled crown. "But do I have to call you Your Majesty? Look, *if I turned out to be the king*, your majesty, you could just *call me Muggs—*"

"Stop your driveling. You'll be rewarded soon enough if you get in on this trick. Yes, you'll be—never mind." There was a curious note of cruelty in the king's short laugh. "Get on with your duty, Muggs. When you come back we'll work together and everything will be fine."

The chauffeur felt a strange elation as he strode into the tunnel. The farther he went, the more his enthusiasm ran away with him. The king, he reflected, was many miles away. Many, many miles. And had no idea how to reach this tunnel. If there was magic here for the taking—

"I've been a chauffeur long enough!" Muggs evclaimed. "Why don't I—why shouldn't I—hm-m-m. I might be. I could be—and if I was, I'd tell them what was what. My friends could just call me Muggs, none of this Your Majesty stuff. H-m-m-m. If I was king, *he'd* have to listen to *me*. Then *my* orders would be the good ones, and I wouldn't have to obey any of his."

He turned this over in his mind with a purpose, a moment later, when he discovered some bags of explosives tucked away in a corner of the passageway.

"Now there you are," he thought. "Dynamite. If I were king, I would say, Capture those trouble makers. Get them while the getting's good. Then, once I said it, that's what would happen and there'd be no argument about it."

He considered what should be done. He weighed a sack of explosives in his hands.

"But I'm not the king," he said. "I'd better hike on to that laboratory."

SOME minutes later, just as he came within view of the immense subterranean room, a terrific explosion blew him off his feet. The walls fairly rocked with the deafening blast. Echoes rolled back and forth through the tunnels for what seemed minutes.

Muggs could see that Sondra, far across the room, had fallen. Apparently she was dead. And apparently her friend the prince was too much stunned to do anything about it. The Old Lady must be hiding around somewhere, too, Muggs thought. Personally he didn't care to concern himself with their misfortunes. He had some ideas of his own.

"So the king thinks I should go through *that*, does he? Who is he, to do my thinking for me? I've got a brain of my own, and my ideas about this business are better than his. Because I'm here, and he's not." Muggs doubled his fists. "I know this for sure. What happened to that servant girl is not going to happen to me."

As soon as he was sure his footsteps wouldn't be heard, he broke into a run and ran most of the way back. He

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stopped when he came to the bags of explosives. With his long arms he was able to carry several bags—able and willing.

The explosion he set off at the mouth of the tunnel was not loud, and he doubted whether it echoed down through the maze to the three persons in the laboratory. But it was an effective explosion. A few thousand tons of rock came smashing down. When the dust cleared, he saw there was simply no longer an entrance. There was nothing but mountainside. The laboratory was sealed over.

"That's what I'd do if I was the king," Muggs said to himself. Then he jumped in his car and sped away, wondering what had best be said to Levaggo.

CHAPTER IX

Atomic Immunity

NEVER in all her years had the Old Lady seen anything like this. It fairly made white hair curl. The dust was clearing a little, and her sharp old eyes, crossed though they were, managed to take in every detail.

"I knew I would be all right," Sondra was saying.

"You're one in a million, Sondra," the prince said. "Now trust me just once more, and then you'll know you have nothing to fear."

He climbed a stairway to the platform halfway up the side of the giant machine. A machine gun was there in the corner, mounted for guard duty. He aimed it at Sondra, and bullets prayed a path along the wall behind her. The path would have perforated her body, but she was immune now. She had acquired an "atomic immunity" that would be hers for life. Bullets had no power to hurt or mar her flesh as they passed through her body. She was smiling up at him confidently.

The Old Lady watched and began to understand.

He next turned the spray of machine gun bullets on the small blue airplane at one side of the big room. He was testing, the Old Lady realized, to make sure that it too possessed this strange quality of immunity, from some previous treatment. No bullet holes appeared in the fuselage.

"We gave it the cannon blast more than ten years ago," Randall said to Sondra after he had silenced the gun. "We always kept it here for emergencies."

"We?" Sondra asked.

"My father and I." Randall hurried down the stairs to her. He brushed the dust from her clothes as he explained. "Before my father's death, he was well on his way to discovering many uses of atomic power that are still unknown. It will take me years to dig through the studies he has left for me. But I can't think of a happier or more useful way to spend my life. However, we've no time to talk of that now. In an emergency like this, we'd better take the plane."

"You're right. The Old Lady mustn't be kept waiting."

The Old Lady, listening to every word, sat down smiling to herself with pleasurable contemplation. "Bless their hearts, they're going to get there before I grow impatient. They're so refreshing. I wouldn't have missed spying on them for anything."

She might not admit to herself that she had come along because she had been so frightened over this experiment. She had watched Sondra all through these years, knowing that this day would have to come. For she had memorized all of those secret documents

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before the late Randello had ever sealed them in the vault.

"The girl who will dare to share these bold experiments in atomic transformation, who shall be the choice of my son Randall, shall be his queen, and he shall be king from that day . . ."

AND that was to be today, and at last she had seen with her own eyes the transformation blast. Now she was seeing one more evidence of its marvelous effects. The plane.

The motors roared, the little blue plane raced out onto the floor. It lifted. It plunged straight for the rock wall on the other side of the room. It began to circle. One wing cut into the wall, but there was no ripping of wing or spraying of stone. Nor was there the slightest loss of speed. The plane plunged on as if the wall were not there. In another second it was gone, leaving no visible trail behind it.

"Through solid stone!" the Old Lady gasped. "The miracles of atomic immunity!"

Suddenly she came out of her daze and found herself still sitting beside a pyramid of fuel drums deep in the laboratory cavern. "Ugh! What about me? Why didn't I go along? Here I sit like I'd been struck by lightning. I'll be late!"

She hobbled toward the tunnel road. Her feet were sore but she felt compelled to run. She cursed herself for being so absent-minded. "It can't be that I'm getting old!"

Now she would have to puff all the way back through the long tunnel—but, no! There was the jeep.

The engine had a good rhythm, and all the long way up the zigzag trail she kept repeating to herself, in time with the bounces, "I'm in luck. I've got a jeep. I'm in luck. I've got a jeep."

But when she reached what should have been the exit to fresh air and blue sky she discovered that she was no longer in luck. What had happened? The way was blocked. Closed. Sealed. An avalanche had come this way. A man-made avalanche? What could she do? "It can't be that I'm geting old," she muttered stubbornly, and climbed out and began throwing stones in all directions.

She unfastened a shovel from the side of the jeep and tried digging with all her furious strength. "My poor white hair will be black. I'm getting black in the face, too. This will never do."

No, it might take a day's work to reach daylight. Back at the palace they might scheme to give her up for lost, the same as Sebastian was lost. Then, with a free hand on those documents in the Vault, there would be no deed too evil for King Levaggo to attempt.

"They've got me! They've got me!" she muttered angrily. "If there was only a magic lamp to rub . . . Or a magic rope to pull . . . Or a cable? . . . With a hook, maybe, and a bucket of rocks. Ughhh!"

All at once the Old Lady was scared, and for the first time in many many years she wanted to scream.

"Bah! You're too old to scream!" she told herself. "Stop acting like a baby. Get back in the jeep and drive like hell. Something's got to give."

CHAPTER X

Guards, Mounted and Demounted

IN THE palace study, amid the criss-crossed trees of the wall paper, the king and his chauffeur, Muggs, engaged in a warm conference. Muggs was talking fast, but not quite fast enough. He had sped home from the mountain

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trails like a good boy, and was doing his best to stick to the story he had rehearsed all the way.

"So that's how it is. They're gone. They won't be back."

The king growled. "I don't get it. Where did they go?"

"It's like I said, they went *poof!* Nearly busted my ear drums. You never heard such an explosion."

"So they went *poof*. Are you sure it wasn't *bang?*"

Muggs nodded quickly. "That's right, your majesty, it was *bang*. It was *bang* and *poof* both at the same time."

"What about the Old Lady?"

"Same *poof*."

"Where are their bodies?"

"No bodies left. Honest, I thought the whole mountain was going to shake down."

"Well, that's going to make things devilishly complicated, with no bodies. We've got to have some proof." The king scowled and pulled at the points of his double-pointed black beard.

"I guess maybe you'll want to give me a promotion," said Muggs hopefully. The build-up he'd practiced didn't seem to have been timed to the king's darkening mood.

"Don't be in a hurry. First you'll have to take me there, so I can see the scene for myself."

Muggs shifted his feet uncomfortably. "I don't know whether I could ever find my way back, your majesty. I doubt it. It was an awful strange road."

"Such talk! Get the car ready. The crowd's wasting in the Arena, and I've got to know what's what before I face them. We'll go at once and trace down that *poof* to be sure . . . What are you scringing about?" The king seized him by the shoulders. "Are you lying to me? What's the matter?"

"I just remembered, I left the motor running." Muggs bowed as briefly as the law would allow and ran out before the king could stop him. It was high time, he had suddenly decided, for him to take himself for a ride. The royal wrath was about to descend in full fury.

The car responded to Muggs' touch. He swung around the circular drive, shot across one corner of the wide palace lawn, and headed straight for the nearest open gate.

Clang! The big steel-barred gate swung closed.

MUGGS brakes screeched, but too late. *Crash!* The royal bumper and radiator gave a left hook and an uppercut to the steel bars and went into a clinch.

"Muggs!" the gatekeeper yelled. "Have you gone crazy? You better go back and square things with the king. The way he rung that emergency bell, he must be mad. What'd you do to him? He's alerted the palace guard."

"Help me out of here! Muggs yelled, trying furiously to disentangle his limousine from the steel bars. Then—"What's that roar?"

"It's a plane. Look out! It's coming right at us. *Duck!*"

The small blue plane roared down from the air without warning. It was headed straight for the steel gate. To crash? The gatekeeper and Muggs dived for the grass. Then they stared. The plane shot straight through the upper half of the gate and the high steel fence. It shot through without so much as denting a steel bar or ripping a wing. It simply went *through*. It landed intact on the palace lawn.

The only visible damage occurred to the mounted guards, marching in formation around the palace grounds. The plane almost got them. Sixteen horses were thrown into a panic and half the

(Continued on page 168)

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(Continued from page 166)

riders were thrown into the grass.

Randall and Sondra jumped out of the plane. They looked over the small riot they had caused and decided they could use a pair of horses as the quickest way of getting to the Arena at the rear of the grounds.

It was a mistake. Prince Randall had forgotten that these mounted guards were the king's special pets, known to be so belligerent that even the horses wore chips on their shoulders.

"Come back with those horses, you two! Who the devil do you think you are?" The captain of the guards spurred his mount to give chase. "Oh, it's them! That young upstart of a prince. Come on, men."

The mounted guards hadn't meant to do any hard riding this late in the afternoon. They were on dress parade, policing the grounds for the benefit of the Askandia crowds that were gathering in the Arena. But now that the king had sounded the emergency bell, every loyal officer knew it was his duty to arrest any disturbers of the peace.

Randall and Sondra galloped over a hedge and down the ramp that led to one of the outside Arena entrances. They could see that thousands of people were gathered, and at first they thought that the meeting was in progress.

BUT as soon as they were recognized, by the clusters of people at the entrance, and hailed with loud greetings of, "The prince! Sondra! Here they are! Make way! Make way!" they realized that they were not only in time, but were face to face with an impatient audience.

"Come on in!" several people yelled. "The Red Door is waiting! Let's see you do it!"

Randall laughed inside himself. So it had happened. The rumor had spread far and wide that here was a door of death. A door with knives that spun invisibly. A death trap that had claimed its own inventor, the incomparable Whiteblock. And would claim anyone else who walked into it. But not Prince Randall. He had walked through it unscathed, and by now all Askandia had heard.

For a moment he ignored the bellow of the captain of the mounted guards, at his rear. "You are arrested, Prince Randall, in the name of the King!"

He could afford to ignore the bellow because Sondra was whispering news to him that one of her servant friends had just given her.

"The Old Lady hasn't shown up. Everyone's waiting."

"Where could she be?"

"Across the village, perhaps, at her own mansion."

"We'll get her. Come on."

Randall and Sondra reined about and started up the ramp. The mounted guards rode after them, and the captain continued to recite his orders for arrest. But they weren't listening. They broke into a gallop, they headed for the nearest open gate. The gatekeeper jumped to save his neck, and spun about like a top. The two riders were being pursued by fourteen mounted guards and two unmounted ones coming on a dead run.

The crowds at the entrances of the Arena heard the hard hoofbeats and the shouting of orders. People began to pour out, to look down on the village and watch the zigzagging course of this wild chase.

The Old Lady's mansion yielded nothing. "She's gone!" someone yelled in response to their flying questions. "She left early this morning. Hasn't been seen since!"

"This is dreadful!" Sondra cried,

(Continued on page 170)

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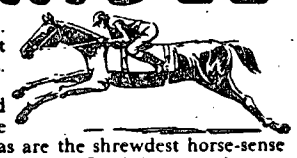
IF YOU MUST GAMBLE



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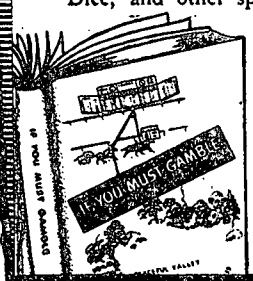

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(Continued from page 168)

hugging the saddle, her brown hair flying. "What could have happened?"

"We'd better tackle Levaggo!" Randall yelled.

"He wouldn't dare harm her — or would he?"

THEY galloped back into the road and up through the village. Again fourteen mounted guards were hot on the trail, shouting threats, now, that they would shoot. "I command you to halt and submit! Halt or we'll fire."

"Bullets, indeed!" the prince yelled back, borrowing the king's favorite expression. "Why don't you give us an escort? We want to see the king."

Again he underestimated the captain's belligerence. Bullets began to pop through the streets. By the time the race returned to the palace grounds, the guards were shooting right and left. They seemed to be missing, and they couldn't understand it. They tried harder. Toward the palace the curious throngs surged back, screaming.

Pandemonium all over the palace grounds—the most undignified and unsuccessful engagement in the history of Askandia's mounted nobility!

Meanwhile, Muggs the chauffeur had again been brought face to face with the king inside the palace.

"You lout. You liar. You've failed me on every hand. Did they find a chemical laboratory down that tunnel or didn't they?"

"Honest, your majesty, I don't know."

The king looked to the window. "There they go again, defying death and liking it. Is the Old Lady as much alive as they are?"

"Alive," said Muggs, "but stuck. Imprisoned. Trapped."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that I closed the mine after

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she went in. Since she didn't escape in the airplane with them, she must still be there."

"Now we're getting somewhere," the king sighed hopefully. "So you think they flew out the top and she's still there. Stuck. I hope you're right this time. As long as she's there, I can still save my face. She can't enforce any deal now. She's too late. They're already beginning to leave. In another ten minutes—what are you staring at?"

The king's eyes traced the chauffeur's stare through the window and saw for himself. It was the Old Lady, driving up the highway in a jeep.

The steel gate was closed, but she drove right *through* and kept on coming.

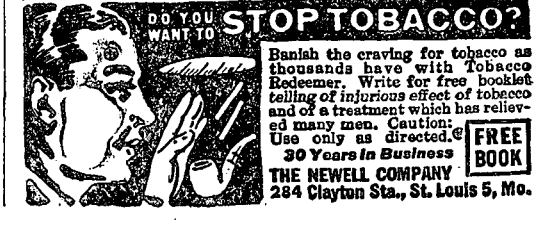
The king knocked Muggs off his feet in his haste to get out of the room. For all his weight, he made a record dash from his study to the nearest Arena entrance. The aisles had begun to jam with people who had grown impatient and decided to leave. But suddenly the throngs began to surge back shouting, and the whole auditorium crowd at once knew.

"The Old Lady. The Old Lady. OOOOOOLD LAAADEEEE!"

A CORTEGE of guards in white uniform and gold braid escorted the king along a balcony passage. He descended to the Arena floor and marched toward the front just in time to see the Old Lady enter.

The aisles made way for her. She was standing up in the jeep, her wild white hair was flying, her eyes were jumping in all directions at once, she was taking in the whole crowd and they were welcoming her, like a long lost mother.

She had driven down the ramp to enter, and now she drove straight through the center aisle, straight toward the twenty steps at the front of



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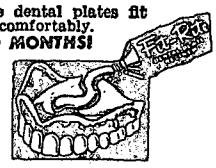

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the Arena.

The path didn't close in after her. Instead, it widened, to make way for the heavy galloping hoofs. She glanced back, nearly running over a pair of guards as she did so, and saw that Sondra and Randall were riding in after her as hard as they could come.

"Climb aboard, you youngsters!" she yelled back at them.

Randall leaped from his horse to the rear of the jeep and reached up to swing Sondra down in his arms. Back of them came their trail of pursuers, angry and cursing in the name of the king. The Old Lady stepped on it.

"The Red Door!" some shrill voice cried out. "Look out!"

And a thousand people were shrieking, "LOOK OUT! Stop! STOPPPP!"

With its three passengers, the jeep climbed the twenty steps and shot through the Red Door. It whirled half around, so that Sondra, Randall, and the old Lady stood, looking out at their crowd from beneath the horizontal knives. Neither they nor the jeep had been scratched during this ordeal, and the crowd went wild.

They went wilder still to discover that the mounted guards were coming on, determined not to be outdone. In fact, King Levaggo was there on one of the lower steps, shouting to his guards to come on.

They came, with plopping hoofs. The king pointed the way. And when some shrill voice cried, *"A new king!"* the arms of Levaggo struck the air savagely.

"Remove them, I command you! Arrest them!" Levaggo's rasping voice was lost in the clatter of hoofs up the twenty steps.

"We've got them now!" the captain of the guards shouted, as he passed the twentieth step.

Approximately ten thousand pairs of

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eyes saw what happened. The first horse and rider got it. Captain and mount. They were sliced like colored paper, too fast to be believed, and the slices went *out*. The rear hoofs of the horse survived and fell back. The rest, along with the rider, were simply gone.

THE second rider saw and leaped from his horse just in time. The horse plunged into the knives' invisible whirl but was dead before it was half through. In fact, the rearward half never got through, for its momentum was lost. Half a horse fell on the stone at the twentieth step and half a saddle bounced down the steps to the Arena floor.

The third horse and rider were much too determined to succeed where the others had failed. Half a horse and half a rider fell back. But the half rider was struck by the oncoming horse and flew into the knives again and was gone.

The fourth rider's horse lost only a head.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh changed their minds and turned the chase back.

The king, running up to the eighteenth step, waving his arms madly, had changed his tune. In all justice to him, let it be said that he had tried to put the whole parade in reverse as soon as he had seen the captain of the guards depart into nothingness.

But also, in all fairness, let it be noted that a moment earlier the king had hoped the captain of the guards would *try*. For whatever the facts of atomic immunity, it always seemed on the surface of things that if one person walked or rode through a door, another should be able to. It was the same fallacy that had once seized Whiteblock.

The fact was, as Levaggo became accustomed to saying in later years, either

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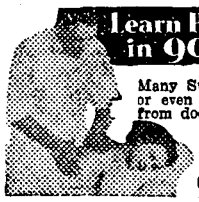

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you have it or you don't.

Muggs the chauffeur came to that conclusion himself at this moment. He was standing somewhere in the rear of the Arena, taking in the whole weird show. And like hundreds of other simple and good hearted souls he would have liked to believe that he might move beneath those stationary electric knives as easily as Prince Randall.

"And then maybe I could be the king and have a beautiful queen like Sondra."

His eyes moistened a little as he listened to the hearty boom of the Old Lady, reciting from the documents she had found in the Vault.

FINALLY, to give the crowd what they wanted, she made her own little speech. "So I congratulate you upon your new king and—as soon as a wedding can be arranged—your new queen."

She paused to wait for the tumultuous cheering to die away.

"I know they'll be worthy. They are not only young, strong, and fearless, but they are also strangely gifted to live and to resist danger for all of their natural lives. Old age will take them in time, just as it is about to take me—" she rubbed her hip, thinking of the tough fight she had had in the tunnel.

Then she brightened, and slapped her white hair back over her forehead and felt strangely young. After all, she had had the nerve to take her own dose of that atomic magic, by hanging a weight on the cable and driving her jeep in front of the big black cannon. She felt young enough to shake the daylights out of stupid chauffeur if she ever got her hands on him—though he was probably acting under the king's orders, for all she knew.

Her eyes caught the figure of the ex-king.

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"In conclusion—you, Levaggo. Don't go away. The new king and queen are going to have a hard time clearing up all the troubles you've piled up for them."

Then she gestured to what lay on the stairs.

"Speaking of troubles piled up," she boomed, "I recommend to the new king and queen their first official order. Why not appoint your cousin Levaggo to an office? Let him begin at once. I et him do something big and clean. Ma e him the first superintendent in c.. ge of cleaning up all surplus horsefles "

From the thunderous cheers tl it greeted this suggestion, everybody, - cluding ex-King Levaggo, knew tl it the appointment was unanimous.

THE END

OIL HUNTERS

☆ By C. S. RICE ☆

IT LOOKS as if the old hit and miss days of searching for oil deposits are over, and al ng with the new era just ushered in, Science as taken the guess work out of Wildcatting. N w days, if you know your germs, and especially he science of Bacteriology, you will have the ju p on all the other prospectors who are still us g the "sink a well and pray" method. I. a i- entific paper prepared by Dr. Claude E. Z.. ell of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, i is shown how bacteria had a number of import nt roles in the development of the ea th's petrol m deposit. "It was evidently a complex and leng ty process," says Dr. Zo Bell, "involving forty to fifty kinds of bacteria and taking millions of years." The process started out with the remo al of sulphur, phosphorous and nitrogen by some of the bugs, and leaving carbon and hydrogen wh ch are the constituents of petroleum and natural as. Some of the bacteria are also responsible for he formation of the oil pools, as they destroyed r- tain formations of rocks and left others, mal ng pores through which the oil could seep to lo er levels. After showing how the oil was formed, his paper went on to show that this knowledge an be of practical value. By knowing that cer in forms of bacteria have a fondness for petrole m, and knowing that lighter, more volatile petrol m parts diffuse to the earth's surface directly o er pools of oil, scientific "Bug Hunters" may nd the bacteria deposits and know for certain at here is where to sink a well.

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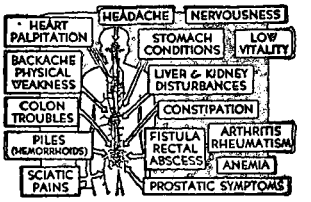

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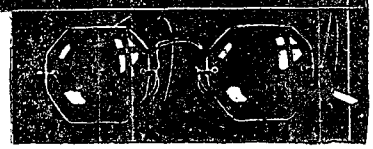

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Enchanted Arena

★ By GARY LEE HORTON ★

MOCKING every physical law known to man, is a circle of land, 125 feet in diameter, located four miles from Gold Hill, Oregon. The magic spell of this piece of land seems to bring doom to anyone who attempts to learn its secret. On its deserted sands stands the ruins of a wrecked assay office which was abandoned half a century ago, since the scales used to weigh the ore repeatedly refused to function. It was as if some diabolical hand delighted in tipping the scales, now one way, now another, never allowing the true measurement to be seen. It was as it, within the bounds of this 125 foot circle, the law of gravity had ceased to operate.

Investigations of this enchanted arena have disclosed further amazing phenomena associated with it: No compass will function, here. A ball placed on a board which has been carefully leveled will roll toward the north. Objects thrown toward the north on a windless day will return to the spot from which they were thrown. Even the simple physical instrument, the plumb line, will not function here.

The reputation of this amazing spot has evidently spread to the animal kingdom as well as the world of men. No bird will nest in the trees within this area, and birds flying over this circle have been seen to suddenly quiver and drop as if pulled downward by some mysterious force.

No living creature, except man, dares to voluntarily enter the circle of land in which the most basic law of the physical universe seems to be defied.

HEAD SPIN

★ By H. A. EVERTS ★

BALLET dancers and skaters and airplane pilots have one thing in common. They practice the same technique to aid them to retain their equilibrium and avoid dizziness. Ballet dancers and skaters turn their head quickly in the direction of the rotation, fixing their gaze on some point and keeping the head directed toward that point by turning it slowly in the direction opposite to the rotation. In flying this technique involves keeping the head directed toward a series of points on the horizon, ground or clouds during violent maneuvers. In spins, the head is turned quickly in the direction of the spin and slowly back. In loops, coming out of dives and steep turns it is tilted quickly back to fix on a point and slowly forward. The head is moved ahead of the body, in other words, and then the body is allowed to catch up with it.

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FRANKLIN'S FEAT

☆ By CORY BLAKE ☆

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, scientist and statesman, has a long list of accomplishments to his credit. But did you ever stop to think that even granny's rocking chair is attributed to his inventive genius! The first known rocking chair was invented by none other than Benjamin Franklin, the same man who served his country so well at the Constitutional Convention and as Ambassador to France. Scientists choose to remember him for his dramatic experiments with lightning. But those who enjoy the comforts of the rocking chair seldom are aware that in the year 1760 it first took shape in the mind and in the workshop of one of the greatest men of genius that the world has ever known.

SOLAR ENERGY

☆ By PETE BOGG ☆

MUCH has already been written concerning the vast quantity of power stored up in the sun, power that science is planning to use. But already, solar energy has been put to work for the benefit of mankind.

In California and Florida, commercially manufactured solar heaters are mounted on the roofs of houses to supply hot water. At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology there is an experimental house which is kept comfortable even in the cold, New England winter by a solar heating device on the roof. Dr. Eugene Rabinowitch of that institution is experimenting with a method of capturing the power stored in the sun. Sunlight is focused by a lens on a light-sensitive cell, and a tiny amount of electric energy is produced and stored. This device is of no commercial value at present, but further investigations of solar energy are proceeding at both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard.

Only the future will tell what secrets lay at the fingertips of scientists who are working on this problem today.

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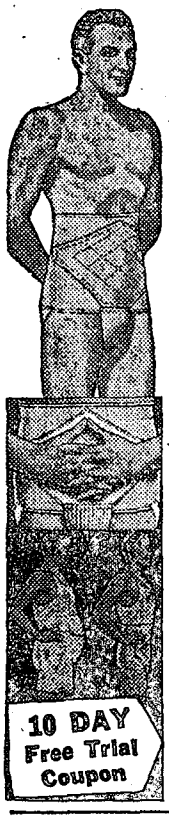

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(Included from page 127)

did not stop, shots from the patrolman's revolver would blast his tires into shreds, send the roadster hurtling to destruction.

Downing gripped the wheel with sweating hands. His heart was a trip-hammer in his chest. The motorcycle behind him was gaining—gaining. Its siren was a shriek of doom in his ears. Abruptly, almost lost in the roar of engines and the wailing of sirens, Downing heard a dull, flat report. A shot! The patrolman, certain now that Downing would not stop, had opened fire.

In a moment of lucidity, Downing glimpsed a milepost up the road. Something about it and the surrounding countryside seemed familiar to him. And then, abruptly, he had the sensation of falling, falling. There was a twisting and wrenching—and then, the night was gone, and the cold was gone, and the sky was a vivid emerald green, and the sun, still rising, was a huge red-gold orb.

Jorelle!

The knowledge rang within Downing like a carillon. He did not slacken the furious speed of the roadster. He kept right on going, straight to the angular white house almost lost in vegetation far down the road. Two figures ran out to meet him as he drew up to a stop.

"Ross! Ross!" It was Lethra, joyful and amazed. "You've come back?"

Downing touched her cheek, smiling into her tawny eyes, his fever, everything, forgotten. "I've come back, little Lehra. Back to stay."

THE END

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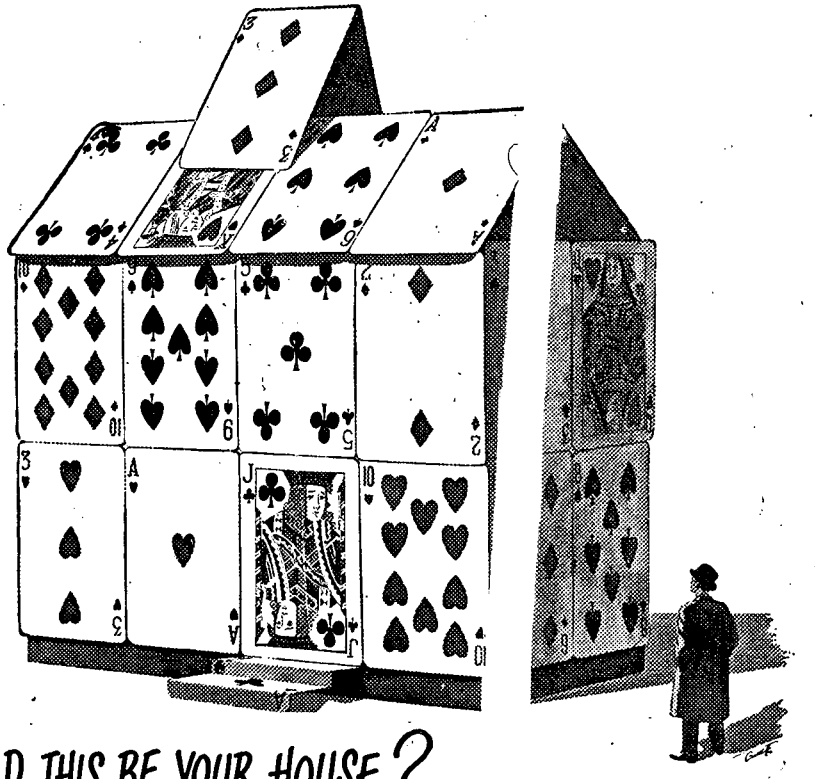

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